



2014 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program - Farm Bill

FY 2014 Final Performance Report
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Organization:

Cape Cod Cranberry Growers' Association

Project Title:

Development of a Nutrient Management Planning Tool for Massachusetts Cranberries

Project Summary:

The new state nutrient management regulations require a great amount of planning resources that currently do not exist in the Commonwealth. There are not enough planners to satisfy the demand in cranberry agriculture. This grant project will allow growers to create their own management plans that can be used for compliance purposes, allowing cranberry growers to apply fertilizer to their bogs. In addition, increasingly food processors are being required to provide reports for how their food product is grown, detailing the decision making at the farm level. The nutrient management program can be used to support those sustainability efforts. By having a self-directed study and evaluation process, growers will not need to rely on outside resource planners that currently don't exist. This will greatly diminish the burden of developing and funding planners. This tool helps fill the void in cranberry agriculture and potentially could be viewed as a model by other sectors of agriculture.

The nutrient management regulations were released this past year. As a result of this grant project, growers had a simple and accurate tool, allowing them to create dynamic nutrient management plans and stay in compliance with the state regulations.

Project Approach:

Develop Nutrient Management Matrix: Linda Rinta, farm planner and the consultant on this project was hired to help write the matrix which would form the basis for the program. Under her guidance and experience, a detailed matrix was developed. Assisting in the development was the University of Massachusetts Cranberry Station, CCCGA and the guidance available from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. In addition, grower focus groups were held to provide much needed review and feedback.

Build Tool: The developers, Fishnet NewMedia, built the nutrient management tool based on the design of the matrix and the recently released state nutrient management regulations. The program was soft-launched in late January 2016.

Grower testing and Feedback: In February 2016, a select group of growers tested out the nutrient management tool, along with researchers from the UMass Cranberry Station. This feedback was then consolidated for the developers by CCCGA and edits made. The edits consisted of verbiage changes and more refined reporting. There were also some errors with the mapping component that needed fixing.

Launch Tool: After some modifications based on grower and UMass Cranberry Station research staff feedback, the program officially launched at the CCCGA Winter Meeting on March 9,



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2016.

Grower Training and Education: Growers had the first training session at the CCCGA Winter Meeting on March 9, 2016. From that point forward, CCCGA conducted additional training sessions at their office, as well as holding ad hoc technical support sessions for individual growers via phone, email and in-person. An educational meeting was held in June 2016 at the UMass Cranberry Station to further explain the use of the program and discuss the new state regulations. This meeting was attended by nearly 30 growers. An online user guide was also created to assist growers when using the program online. Further, the UMass Cranberry Station discussed the soon to be launched tool at their winter meeting, held in January 2016. The availability and simplicity of the tool was also discussed in the CCCGA Bogside monthly newsletter, sent to more than 400 growers and members of the Association.

Grower Evaluation: Growers have now used the program for their first growing season and harvest has just finished. A user survey is now being conducted to measure grower's feedback of the system. With the state regulations being proposed for changes, further development modifications are being withheld until the regulations are complete. Once the regulations are finalized and grower feedback is evaluated, changes to the program will be made for the 2017 growing season. Any regulatory changes will also be included in new training for the growers in order to understand how the system will work, as modified, and to stay in regulatory compliance. Anecdotally, in talking with many growers that have used the system, they are amazed with the simplicity and ecstatic over how this tool can bring them into regulatory compliance in just a few minutes.

Goals and Outcomes Achieved:

The primary goal of this grant project is improvement in nutrient management decision making. Although existing resources exist for making nutrient management decisions, with the new state regulatory requirements, this grant has enabled a stream-lined process, self-directed decision process in electronic format. This newly created tool is the first and only online nutrient management tool for Massachusetts cranberry growers and likely, all cranberry growers in North America. The simple to use tool allows growers to create nutrient management plans with the click of a few buttons. All of the research information that is part of the UMass Cranberry Station guidelines is also contained in the program for the growers to read and understand. This can be done from their office, in the field or anywhere they have an internet connection. Not having to rely on a book for direction on nutrient management decisions will help growers with decision making in real-time. The program retains all of this information, plus grower's individual data, creating a historical archive. The program also contains dynamic maps of the grower's bogs, another regulatory requirement. This mapping component is one of the great time-saving features of the program but also allows the grower's to see their fertilizer applications directly on the maps. This is a great visual aid, as opposed to simply tabular data.

The original methods for determining the nutrient decision making will not work. First, the regulations do not require the plans to be submitted to the MA Department of Agricultural resources as was originally presumed. As a result, there are no plans for MDAR to count. Second, the technical design of the program does not allow for the determination of whether a



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grower utilized the program. This also was assumed but was not technically feasible. Since it's a regulatory requirement that all growers have a management plan if they are farming more than 10 acres, trust will need to be the measure that growers are in compliance by utilizing the tool.

An electronic survey is being conducted and will help to determine participation levels for BOGS Online Grower System users that are utilizing the nutrient management tool. Results of this survey will help determine usage but also direct future changes to the program. CCCGA has already discussed the use of the nutrient management tool in our monthly Bogside newsletter, mailed to over 300 growers each month. We have discussed the use of the tool, grower's satisfaction and how to sign up. This approach will continue. We also had a grower workshop in June to discuss how to use the program, targeting new users and this was attended by nearly 30 growers. We will also discuss the use of the tool at our Winter Meeting in March 2017. This meeting draws 300 plus growers. The tool was also discussed at the UMass Cranberry Station annual update meeting in January 2016.

Our initial attempts at outreach did not garner a good response. We were going to conduct another attempt with more emphasis and better timing but then considered that with the Massachusetts Nutrient Management Regulations currently undergoing changes, we did not want to get too much focused feedback if the regulations are going to potentially change. What we did instead is to create a tool in the admin section where we can determine grower participation with the tool (more on that below). This tool also applies to all of the other sections of the BOGS Online Grower System, allowing for a seamless measure for determining basic usage over time. We also conducted two grower feedback sessions to hear directly from the users and be able for them to literally show us potential problems with the nutrient management tool in terms of navigation, data/report display, additional reports/tools required, hear in-depth how the growers used the system and how they'd like to use the system and have a dynamic conversation about the tool. Although this was not a user survey, the thinking was that for this initial end of season data gathering that we obtained much more information through direct communication, combined with the basic usage tool that we had built.

In the feedback sessions, we were able to identify areas where we can improve the tool for the 2017 growing season, while we still await upcoming potential regulatory changes that MAY necessitate us editing the program for compliance purposes. We have implemented most of these changes but are still working through others. Some of these are reports that will be used to give to workers and hired applicators. These reports will make for clearer instructions, eliminating human error and should improve regulatory compliance, best management practices, efficacy, while simultaneously lowering environmental concerns. Some of the reports will be beneficial for growers own analysis and decision making which will reap benefits as they consider this year's management decisions as well as future nutrient management decision making.

We also learned some basic satisfaction with the tool. No growers were displeased. The suggested improvements were generated by users that were enthused with the simplicity of the system and discovered additional benefits and ways to enhance the value of the system. Other growers that attended learned from other users and were able to gain confidence in furthering their use of the system. All of this would not have been attained with a survey and has delivered more value and more enthusiasm.



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Beneficiaries:

The primary beneficiaries of the grant project are the cranberry growers of Massachusetts. To date, 75 growers are using the BOGS Online Grower System with the newly created Nutrient Management tool incorporated. These growers are now able to be in compliance with the state's nutrient regulations, allowing them to apply fertilizer to their bogs. It also is a simple and easy tool to use, allowing them to create a plan in a matter of minutes. The tool also enables them to record their fertilizer use, again a regulatory compliance necessity but also can be used to satisfy marketplace demands. The creation of the plan has saved these growers a minimum of \$175,000 as compared to the costs of hiring a professional to create the plan. It is also saving the grower's time and increasing their efficiencies as a result.

The online administrative tool has demonstrated that 46% of the BOGS users used the nutrient management tool. This was below our targeted rate. Some of that is attributed to growers that were not sure how easy it was to utilize the system. Other growers hired private contractors to do their plans – again, not realizing how BOGS can seamlessly create their plans. I expect the usage to increase as word spreads on the value of the program. We have found it difficult to measure grower nutrient management decision making, particularly in the first year of a state regulatory process where growers were trying to simply understand the regulations and compliance standards. We will continue to attempt at quantifying decision making. Based on the feedback of the user sessions, having improved data and reports will certainly increase efficiencies, effectiveness and compliance – all of which are part of decision making in some facet. With a system that is easy to use, ongoing use of the tool will move all growers towards a path of improved decision making.

Lessons Learned

The biggest lesson learned is that Massachusetts cranberry growers can have a simple to use tool that satisfies their need for regulatory compliance in regard to fertilizer use. The tool also has a simple record keeping function, another need of the industry. All of this is now achievable through an online program. The reason it is so simple and easy to use is due to the planning that went into the creation of the tool itself. By utilizing the skill set of an experienced farm planner, plus attaining grower feedback along the way, a highly successful tool was created. While creating the matrix, the original plan was getting very detailed and as a result, complicated. By having grower focus group input, the design was scaled back, providing just the basics of what the grower's needed and the regulations called for. This made a much easier system to navigate and less intimidating to the users. As a result, they have embraced the system. More details can be added, as needed, in the future but the initial launch is exactly what the cranberry growers of Massachusetts wanted and required.

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Organization:

Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture, Inc.

Project Title:

Increasing Specialty Crop nutrition knowledge and consumption through press and buyer outreach.

Project Summary:

In collaboration with buy-local partner groups, CISA held four educational events for growers, buyers, and the press with the goal of increasing the consumers' knowledge and consumption of specialty crops. Each tour was held at a farm and featured guest presentations that address topics such as storage, value-added processing, and food safety for specialty crops. Bringing growers, buyers, and the press together will provide buyers and the press with the stories and personal connection to farms and farmers that will allow them to more effectively educate consumers. Tours were supported with written information that could inform media stories, salespeople, signage, and in-store and on-line information. We also developed two workshops for specialty crop wholesale producers on communication strategies to increase sales, including improved communication with buyers and with the end consumer.

In our previous Specialty Crop Block Grant, CISA educated wholesale buyers about local sourcing and trained specialty crop growers to enter or expand wholesale markets. Our focus groups and networking meetings revealed a need for additional communication activities designed to increase the competitiveness of specialty crops by helping buyers 'know their farmer'. Specialty crop producers who sell through intermediary channels such as retail outlets, institutions, or restaurants can benefit from the consumers' interest in locally grown food. Communicating effectively with these end consumers, however, requires creative use of on-line and in-store communications channels and the participation of knowledgeable buyers and sales staff.

This project helped do just that by supporting connections between specialty crop growers and wholesale buyers and providing information about specialty crop growers for use at retail outlets, restaurants, and institutions. Through labeling, signage, on-line communications, on-farm or in-store events, or communication with knowledgeable salespeople, this project helped end consumers who buy specialty crops at retail outlets or institutions gain a connection and loyalty to the farm.

Project Approach:

We officially started this work in April 2015 and completed the activities in September, 2016 and completed our outcomes measurements in May, 2017. We collaborated with our partners to educate press and buyers about specialty crops and specialty crops producers in ways that would translate for the end consumer. Our primary goal was to increase the consumers' knowledge and consumption of specialty crops. Our objectives in this project are to:

- 1) Educate press and wholesale buyers about specialty crops
- 2) Educate end-consumer about local specialty crops
- 3) Train specialty crop farmers to better promote their products.



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During this grant period, CISA and our partners worked with both specialty crop farmers and buyers. We held four on-farm press/buyer events to increase knowledge of local specialty crops, provided information at each tour for buyers and press, educated press and buyers about food safety programs in place, and hosted two workshops on buyer communication/food safety for specialty crop farmers. In addition, we provided direct technical assistance to three specialty crop producers, and worked with 23 restaurants to support their direct communication to end-consumers about local specialty crops.

The four on-farm press/buyer events were:

- ☐ 5/26/16 (CISA): Tour of Warm Colors Apiary, South Deerfield to learn about honey production and value-added processing of specialty crops.
- ☐ 7/26/16 (CISA): Tour of Fungi Alley, Hadley to learn about mushroom production and food safety.
- ☐ 8/1/16 (Berkshire Grown): Tour of Brattle Farm, Pittsfield to learn about vegetable production.
- ☐ 9/13/16 (CISA): Tour of Apex Orchard, Shelburne Falls to learn about orchard production and Integrated Pest Management (IPM).

The two workshops for specialty crops growers were:

- ☐ March 2016 (Northeast Harvest): hosted a workshop for farmers on food safety standards to help farmers understand improvements to and communicate their food safety-related activities to buyers. With 48 Specialty Crop Producers.
- April 11 (CISA): CISA hosted a workshop in advance of our annual grower-buyer meet and greet in which Big Y's produce manager spoke about how to communicate with large buyers and best practices. With 19 Specialty Crop producers.

Non-specialty crop producers did attend our workshops; however their participation was off-set by matching and in-kind support. Otherwise, all activities solely benefited specialty-crop producers.

Our partners on this grant provided critical geographic support—without them we would not be able to provide specialty crop farmers in Berkshire County or Northeastern Massachusetts with training on communications/food safety (in the northeast) nor would we have been able to reach press/buyers in the Berkshires. Our partners have on-the-ground knowledge of local farmers and buyers that was critical to the success of this project.



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Goals and Outcomes Achieved:

Benchmark	Original Target	Actual Outcomes (2014/2015 data)
Goal: Increase consumer knowledge about local specialty crop producers.		
Performance Measure: Number of stories about local specialty crops and specialty crop producers in the media (by media outlets who receive CISA and partners’ press releases and event invitations).		
Number of press stories is one mechanism to increase consumer knowledge, but true success towards this goal through the press will be a result of multiple years of very good press coverage. Funding for this project will ensure that CISA and partners can dedicate time and resource in 2015 to ensuring press coverage for specialty crops.	Ten (10) stories by September 2016	Eleven (11) plus stories
		Stories as a direct result of our tours:
		Brattle Farm, a green treasure where you’d least expect it; The Berkshire Edge
		Brattle Farm; Berkshire Food and Travel
		http://www.buylocalfood.org/local-businesses-find-warm-colors-apiary-sweet/
		http://www.buylocalfood.org/inside-fungi-ally-hadleys-mushroom-cultivation-center/
		http://www.buylocalfood.org/growing-mushrooms-can-be-a-lucrative-growing-business/
		Selection of stories by press stations who attended our tours:
		http://www.recorder.com/Ciesluk-Farm-bird-cannon-4179337
		http://www.gazettenet.com/Farmers-could-soon-receive-drought-relief-loans-4455671
		http://www.masslive.com/news/index.ssf/2016/09/recent_rain_doesnt_mean_end_to.html
		http://www.buylocalfood.org/massappeal-understanding-mushrooms/
		http://www.buylocalfood.org/20929-2/
		http://www.buylocalfood.org/honey-festival-buzzes-back-for-another-year/
Goal: Increase specialty crop producers’ ability and capacity to communicate to buyers.		
Performance Measure: Number of growers that invest in additional online communications.		
25% of farmers who filled out CISA’s year-end survey request assistance on web design and communication (2013 year-end survey).	Two (2) specialty crop producers invest in online communications by September 2016.	67 Special Crops producers attended the two workshops on commutations with buyers/food safety trainings and three farms received support from CISA staff on press work, social media, and online presence.
		Two farmers have confirmed that they have invested in additional communications.
Goal: Increase intermediary buyers (retail outlets, etc.) knowledge of local specialty crops and specialty crop producers.		
Performance Measure: Number of buyers report increased knowledge of local specialty crops.		



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Currently buyers have a range of knowledge on specialty crops. But interest in learning more is high. One buyer at a recent tour said they wanted to know more about:		8 buyers increased their knowledge of specialty crops.
'Local organic farms of all kinds, with as much info shared as possible about their processes. I'm also interested in learning about ways that farmers are diversifying in order to survive economically.'	Eight (8) buyers by September 2016.	One hundred percent of the buyers who attended CISA's tours said that they gained information to increase their purchase of specialty crops. One buyer said, in answer to this question, "Yes, indeed. We still need to evaluate whether we have the demand and the proper storage/display environment to maintain the quality and shelf life of these products before deciding on next steps. This tour certainly gave (me) the information to bring to, and help, (owner) explore and evaluate that."
Goal: Increase sales for local specialty crops.		
Performance Measure: Number of buyers who add or increase purchase of local specialty crops.		
Four buyers who filled out CISA's year-end survey mentioned that they were interested in purchasing more specialty crops from MA than they were already purchasing.	Five (5) by May 2017.	10 buyers who filled out CISA's year-end surveys over the past two years made a specific commitment to purchasing more!

Beneficiaries:

There were two direct beneficiary-types of our project. Direct beneficiaries included 70 farmers who sell products from mushrooms to Christmas trees, though most of them produce fruits and vegetables. Examples include an apple orchard in Franklin County, a mixed vegetable producer in Berkshire County, a ginger and bedding plants farm in Hampden County, and a mushroom producer in Hampshire County. Specialty crop producers benefited from our workshops and direct support from project staff all of which helped to increase sales for specialty crop farmers. In addition attendees from 8 buyer-organizations benefited from the projects' educational tours and 23 restaurants benefited from the consumer-focused communications we developed with them.

Finally, customers who shop at retail venues or eat at restaurants benefited from the increase in awareness and availability of specialty crops.

Lessons Learned



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In the course of this project it became clear to us that of our target buyers (retailers, institutions, and restaurants) it was often the restaurants that lagged behind in terms of customer education. We worked with restaurants to develop a table-top display that highlighted specialty crop producers in addition to the activities that we had designed into our tours which would allow retailers and institutions to share more about specialty crops.

Attendance at press-buyer tours was varied and extremely difficult to predict. Both press and buyers can attend this discretionary educational offering only if other priorities allow (breaking news, editorial priorities for press and employee schedules/absences, inventory or stocking needs for buyers). Thus we often didn't know until the last minute who was able to attend and we spend lots of time following up with buyers to encourage attendance. Although not as effective at building direct relationships, we believe that short digital tours/talks, might be a way to reach a greater number of buyers.

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Organization:

Harvest New England Association

Project Title:

Enhancing the Competitiveness of New England Specialty Crops through Regional Collaboration

Project Summary:

Schools, hospitals, restaurants, and other institutions are more conscious about where the food they're serving is sourced from. Consumers are demanding local food and transparency about where their food is grown. State and federal contracts are including language which stress the importance of buying local or regional food before buying nationally or even internationally.

To meet those demands and requirements schools, institutions, and restaurants are looking to purchase more regional specialty crops but are struggling to do so. This is an area of purchasing which is becoming more and more important yet harder to accomplish.

From an industry perspective, producers are hungry for and always say there is a need for education and educational opportunities. Evaluations from previous HNE-sponsored conferences reinforce this desire. Direct buying and one-on-one meetings with buyers are very uncommon but are expected to be positively received by the industry.

This project broke down barriers to regional specialty crop purchases at the wholesale level by:

Component 1, Producer Education: specialty crop producers had the opportunity to better understand the wholesale buying and marketing opportunities at the 2015 and 2017 Harvest New England Agricultural Marketing Conference and Trade Show.

Component 2, Consumer Education: educating consumers during HNE Day at the 2015, 2016, 2017 Big E, New England's largest agricultural exposition, on the importance of regional food, where they can source it, and the importance of demanding it. This was accomplished through the Passport to New England where consumers, both adults and children, had the opportunity to learn about New England specialty crops by engaging in agricultural trivia in each state.

Component 3, Producer Buying Opportunities: Harvest New England in partnership with multiple state-specific groups provided one-on-one matchmaking meetings between wholesaler buyers and wholesale specialty crop producers.

This project built on previously funded projects and complimented and enhanced previous work through the following:

Component 1, Producer Education, Harvest New England Ag Marketing Conference and Trade Show was a component previously funded by the USDA SCBG-FP program. The 2011 and 2013 conference was extremely well received. The survey conducted at the 2013 conference concluded that 78% of respondents said they had an increase in sales as a result of marketing techniques learned at the 2011 and 2013 conference.

The difference between the previously funded conference and the 2017 conference is the specific topic of focus. The focused area in 2011 and 2013 was direct to consumer sales. 2014



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SCBG funds has allowed us to build upon the previously established conference and shift the focus for the 2015 and 2017 conference to wholesale marketing and marketing opportunities. New speakers, new tracks, and new seminars and workshop were developed for the 2015 and 2017 conference respectively. The 2011 and 2013 HNE Conference has had great significance to the industry, resulting in a positive impact and change, and is important to the target audience. A record attendance number reinforced the importance of the regional conference. Through continued funding, HNE had the opportunity to expand educational opportunities beyond direct-to-consumer topics and further develop and expand the conference for specialty crop producers.

Project Approach:

Component 1, Producer Education, Harvest New England Ag Marketing Conference and Trade Show Funding from the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources went towards tour buses for specialty crop tour stops and covering a portion of the specialty crop key note speakers' fees.

Planning for the 2017 conference began in 2016. The planning committee thought that adding a hands-on option would be well received and two tour agendas featuring specialty crop farms were assembled and promoted. In the end, only enough participants attended to run one tour. In December, information was released throughout the region by all of the six New England state departments of agriculture. The extent of the promotion in each state varied. Most included email distribution, information in an agency publication, on agency websites and communication to specialty crop commodity associations in each state. Information was also posted on the Harvest New England website and distributed to all previous conference attendees.

New this year, a Facebook event was developed and managed by the New Hampshire Department of Agriculture in conjunction with the registration manager that was hired. This was the first time; HNE had a presence on social media.

Again this year, scholarships were offered through ME Dept. of Ag's SCBG allocation to the conference.

The keynote speaker selected was Craig Ostbo from Koopman Ostbo Marketing Communications in Portland, OR. Mr. Ostbo was the keynote speaker at the National Specialty Crop Block Grant Coordinators Conference in August 2015 and he was willing to travel to the Northeast to be the keynote and general session speaker at the 2017 HNE Conference. His presentations were all very well received and had a great response by attendees.

Component 2, Consumer Education, Harvest New England Day at the Big E HNE Day at the Big E was held again this year on September 29, 2017. All the materials produced for the 2016 event were purchased in a larger, more cost effective in 2016 quantity which allowed for the purchase of materials needed for the event in 2016 and 2017.

The postcards (passports) were distributed on the front lawns of the New Hampshire and Massachusetts/Rhode Island buildings. Here, HNE staff encouraged and explained to Big E attendees how the program worked. The program ran from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Passport goers had until 5:00 p.m. to turn in their completed passport in exchange for a reusable bag which promoted New England grown specialty crops.



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It was decided the logistics of the program would remain the same as 2015 and 2016; users would pick up their passport and find the stamping location within each building. They would be asked one or two questions about specialty crops within their state to obtain a stamp. Once all six stamps were collected they would complete three additional questions on the postcard about specialty crops and redeem the passport for a reusable specialty crop-themed bag.

Component 3, Producer Buying Opportunities, Matchmaking One-on-Ones: As previously mentioned in the SCBG second annual report, Harvest New England board, in partnership with MDAR and MA Farm to School Project began discussions for the buyer/supplier one-on-one meetings to be held during the MA Farm to School Project Conference on November 4, 2016 in Leominster, MA.

Specific outreach was conducted to attract wholesale buyers to this session and outreach to specialty crop producers via digital marketing materials, direct emails, e-newsletters, social media, and through partner organization networks attracted a variety of specialty crop producers. The matchmaking session was organized to provide wholesale buyers and specialty crop producers with the opportunity to meet one-on-one and discuss potential direct buyer/seller relationships. The session was attended by 16 specialty crop producers and over 23 wholesale buyers. The wholesale buyers represented institutions from k12, college and independent school food service operations, as well as wholesale distributors. These buyers were specifically interested in sourcing locally produced specialty crops to serve their student populations.

Pre-session surveys were completed by attending specialty crop producers to determine the characteristics of each producer, the barriers each producers sees in selling to institutions and their goals for the matchmaking session. Farm descriptions and details were then provided to attending buyers, and also to all conference attendees (over 375 people). The results of the pre and post session surveys are outlined below.

Goals and Outcomes Achieved:

	Awarded	Actual
Goal	To educate specialty crop producers and provide buying opportunities between specialty crop producers and wholesale buyers to increase sales and consumption of New England grown specialty crops.	We certainly reached our goal of educating specialty crop producers and providing buying opportunities between specialty crop producers and wholesale buyers with the intention of increasing sales and consumption of New England grown specialty crops.



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Performance Measure	<p>Each component will have a specific performance measure to ensure the overall goal is met.</p> <p>Component 1: Specific questions on the evaluation form asking if specialty crop producers are better aware of how to work with wholesalers and institutions and market their specialty crop products as a result of attending the conference.</p> <p>Component 2: The number of consumers who complete the passport during the 2015, 2016, and 2017 Big E and the responses to the follow up survey which ask participant to assess their change in knowledge about regionally grown specialty crops and where to source them.</p> <p>Component 3: The number of wholesalers and New England producers who participate in the one-on-one buying meetings and follow up survey results afterward.</p>	<p>Component 1: Questions were added to the conference evaluation specific to wholesale buying and purchasing and to measure if there was an increase in specialty crop sales as a result of knowledge gained at the HNE Conference.</p> <p>Component 2: The numbers of passports were counted and a follow up survey was answered by participants at the time of participation to assess their change in knowledge.</p> <p>Component 3: A pre and post survey was completed which yielded the results below.</p>
Target	<p>Overall, there will be a 15% increase in the amount of New England grown product consumed and purchased.</p>	<p>Data provided by the National Ag Statistic Services is a challenge to compare. The 2012 census vs. the annual surveys do not provide data on the same categories or information on a state and regional level. Therefore it is hard to determine the actual increase in the amount of New England grown product consumed and purchased. However, based on the outcomes mentioned below, one can conclude there has been an increase in purchases and consumption of specialty crops throughout the region though that exact number cannot be determined.</p>

Beneficiaries:

Major successful outcomes in quantifiable terms:

Component 1, Producer Education, Harvest New England Ag Marketing Conference and Trade Show According to survey respondents, the benefits of attending the 2015 and/or 2017 Harvest New England Conference are extensive including:

- 58.33% ('15) and 63.16% ('17) of people said it was a great or really great conference
- 36.08% ('15) and 42.6% ('17) of people said their knowledge improved quite a bit or even a ton as a result of attending



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- ☐ 64% of people said they are better aware of how to work with wholesalers and institutions as result of attending
- 16.87% ('15) and 5.83% ('17) were socially disadvantaged farmers and 19.12% ('15) and 36.46% ('17) have been farming for less than 10 years

Component 2, Consumer Education, Harvest New England Day at the Big E On average, 95% had a change in knowledge about what a specialty crop as a result of participating in the program, 80% said they will eat and buy more New England grown specialty crops and that they now know where to buy New England grown specialty crops. Participants were from the six New England states in addition to New York, Florida, Georgia, Minnesota, Michigan, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, California, Ohio, Texas, Hawaii, and New Jersey.

Component 3, Producer Buying Opportunities

- ☐ All of the surveyed (8) farms reported to connecting with up to 10 wholesale buyers.
- ☐ 63% of producers reported their conversations would possibly lead to increased sales and 25% reported the session will definitely lead to increased sales.
- ☐ 100% of producers reported the session met or partially met their goals and expectations of the session and all reported interest in future networking opportunities with Massachusetts Farm to School and institutions across Massachusetts. /selling relationship as a result of the event

For each component of this project, the following beneficiary groups can be identified:

Component 1, Producer Education, Harvest New England Ag Marketing Conference and Trade Show

- ☐ New England specialty crop producers, approximately 750 total in 2015 and 2017.

Component 2, Consumer Education, Harvest New England Day at the Big E:

- ☐ New England specialty crop producers
- ☐ Fairgoers at the 2015, 2016, and 2016 Harvest New England Day at the Big E. The number of passports completed and returned by year is also available. These numbers do not reflect those people who started, but did not complete the program through the state building:
 - o 2015: approximately 900
 - o 2016: approximately 1000
 - o 2017: just over 1000 returned

Component 3, Producer Buying Opportunities

- ☐ Eight MA specialty crop producers
- ☐ Ten MA wholesale institutional buyers



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Lessons Learned

Component 1, Producer Education, Harvest New England Ag Marketing Conference and Trade Show Outreach and marketing is key to the success of the conference. In 2017, a registration manager was hired to assist with conference administration (not paid for with Specialty Crop Block Grant Funds) and it made a huge difference. HNE board members were able to promote the conference better and spend more time identifying speakers, etc. We offered a scholarship program (paid for by ME Dept of Ag's SCBG allocation to the conference) and we could have awarded more scholarships but did have enough qualifying applicants. The tours were a nice offering but didn't have the response we were hoping for.

Component 2, Consumer Education, Harvest New England Day at the Big E: The one area that HNE always falls short on is staffing and/or volunteers. HNE members worked the event with only one break throughout the day. Given it's a very outgoing and interactive job; it turns out to be a rather exhausting day. More volunteers would make it a more effective and enjoyable event for all.

Component 3: Without the partnership of the MA Farm to School Project, the one on ones would not have been possible. It's a reminder about the importance of partnerships and leveraging the resources available without duplicating efforts.

The final lesson learned is to understand the resources provided by USDA NASS. It's unfortunate we were unable to truly identify the percentage increase in specialty crop consumption throughout the region because information available did not facilitate that.

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Organization:

Massachusetts Association of Conservation Districts

Project Title:

Outreach regarding the conflicts between conservation practices and food safety regulations

Project Summary:

MACD staff became familiar with the Food Safety Modernization Act by researching the compliance components and interviewing technical assistance staff at the state and federal level. This review was then compared with the 130 NRCS Conservation Standards allowed in Massachusetts. Through this review we were able to provide information to conservation planners on the possible conflicts between FSMA and the 130 Conservation Standards planners use while developing conservation plans for landowners. MACD staff developed a conservation specific training program. Training was conducted on February 25, 2016 for all MACD and MA NRCS Conservation Planners. We conducted an evaluation of the planner knowledge prior and after to training.

Project Approach:

The proposed FSMA regulations outline numerous strategies to reduce the risk of pathogen contamination in fresh produce that's eaten raw. Several key strategies for reducing risk of human exposure to pathogens via produce are proposed, including the regulation and review of:

- 1) Timing of raw manure application, relative to crop harvest
- 2) manure composting
- 3) irrigation methods, water testing and treatment
- 4) management of manure runoff to crop fields, or manure deposition in crop fields by livestock or wildlife
- 5) cleaning or other treatment of produce surface.

Inherent in the proposed FSMA regulations are conflicts with NRCS Conservation Practices that are associated with fruit and vegetable production; especially those practices which plan for the application of raw manure, or sprinkler irrigation with an untreated water source (drip and furrow irrigation are exempt).

This activity is exactly what we proposed in objective 1 (To identify conflicts between the NRCS conservation practices and FSMA rules and provide this information to NRCS and Conservation Districts so farmers can implement conservation practices and accommodate FSMA rules.) of our project. We specifically identified 12 practices out of the 130 approved in Massachusetts that could have conflicts with FSMA. We implemented of objective 2 on February 23, 2016 by providing an education session for all NRCS and MACD Conservation Farm Planners on FSMA. Planners needed to be aware of the potential conflicts between FSMA and NRCS practices in the plans they will be developing.

List of NRCS Practices that could have interaction with FSMA Regulations NRCS Practice
Potential Interaction with FSMA Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan



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Application of raw manure must comply with NOP's 120/90 rule; which requires a 120-day interval between the application of raw manure and harvest for crops in contact with the soil and 90 days for crops not in contact with the soil.

Nutrient Management Plan

Application of raw manure must comply with NOP's 120/90 rule. For short and mid-season vegetables like beans and lettuce, any application of raw manure would be made the prior fall.

Composting Facility Does Resulting Compost Meet FSMA's Compost Standards (not yet defined)?

Water Well Testing Same Items Tested as in FSMA Water Test?

Pond Does the Pond Water Generally Meet FSMA's Water Test Standards? Water Testing Required Prior to Irrigation; Therefore Cannot Base Irrigation Schedule on Soil Moisture Alone.

Irrigation Reservoir Does the Reservoir Water Generally Meet FSMA's Water Test Standards? Water Testing Required Prior to Irrigation; Therefore Cannot Base Irrigation Schedule on Soil Moisture Alone.

Sprinkler System Does Source Reservoir Water Generally Meet FSMA's Water Test Standards? Water Testing Required Prior to Irrigation; Therefore Cannot Base Irrigation Schedule on Soil Moisture Alone.

Irrigation System Does Source Reservoir Water Generally Meet FSMA's Water Test Standards? Water Testing Required Prior to Irrigation; Therefore Cannot Base Irrigation Schedule on Soil Moisture Alone.

Irrigation Water Management Does Source Reservoir Water Generally Meet FSMA's Water Test Standards? Water Testing Required Prior to Irrigation; Therefore Cannot Base Irrigation Schedule on Soil Moisture Alone.

Nutrient Management Application of raw manure must comply with NOP's 120/90 rule. For short and mid-season vegetables like beans and lettuce, any application of raw manure would be made the prior fall.

Water Well Does the Well Water Generally Meet FSMA's Water Test Standards? Water Testing Required Prior to Irrigation; Therefore Cannot Base Irrigation Schedule on Soil Moisture Alone.

High Tunnel Does the Irrigation Water Generally Meet FSMA's Water Test Standards? Water Testing Required Prior to Irrigation; Therefore Cannot Base Irrigation Schedule on Soil Moisture Alone.

Goals and Outcomes Achieved:

This project was self-funded; therefore the Contract between The Contractor and the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources was terminated, and the parties are no longer under any legal obligations to each other. Though the project was considered terminated, as a final step, MDAR requested, received and accepted the progress report submitted, for informational purposes only.

Beneficiaries:

All landowners and farmers in Massachusetts who are implementing environmental conservation practices benefited. The MACD and NRCS staff developing conservation plans needed to understand the potential conflicts between the FSMA and environmental protection.



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Lessons Learned

The intersection of food safety regulations and conservation technical assistance yielded conflicts that conservation planners needed to be aware of. The lack of information on FSMA could have resulted in unintended consequences of planners developing practices with land owners that would have put them in conflict with FSMA.

Contact Person

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Organization:

Massachusetts Department of Agriculture

Project Title:

Commonwealth Quality Program (CQP) Technical Support Consultant (TSC)

Project Summary:

The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (Department) contracted technical assistance consultants to serve as regionally (county) based independent contractors to assist in the conduct of site audits and field deployed technical assistance, in support of Commonwealth Quality Program (CQP) requirements. Requested support will be provided during the growing season, between May and October, on a recurring annual cycle.

The purpose of the Commonwealth Quality Program (CQP) is to provide specialty crop farm businesses in Massachusetts a standards (BMP) based, market access program, which incorporates Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs), Environmental Practices and sourcing requirements in a clearly defined list of program requirements specific to Massachusetts.

Project Approach:

The objective of the CQP is to assist farmers whose goal is to raise specialty crop products and who aspire to develop their farms into commercially viable operations in the future. Currently sustainable small and mid-sized growers (the primary specialty crop growers in Massachusetts) are facing new business challenges as market dynamics shift and buyers look to capitalize on emerging consumer trends. These market drivers, such as farm food safety and environmental sustainability, have become the foundation of compliance programs, fast becoming a requirement for sale and a barrier to market access.

The requirements of these programs have been based largely on existing best management practices and have been deployed and verified through proprietary and third party support. The CQP facilitates this requirements uptake through the availability of a cost effective third party audit system deployed by the Department, and supported by requirements developed in collaboration with industry partners that incorporates State and Local regulations into a comprehensive deployed program structure.

CQP Technical Support Consultants (TSCs) will provide on-site technical assistance, practice consultation (BMPs) and conduct audits to ensure that participants successfully meet the annual audit requirements of the program. This will provide small and mid-sized specialty crop growers and buyers, who currently accept the requirement as a purchasing prerequisite, assurance that visits and technical support are ongoing and scalable.

A two week training program, also included in this grant request, will be administered by the Department and the UMASS Agricultural Extension to prepare program TSCs before they field deploy. Training will include both class room and practical in-field rotations.

Goals and Outcomes Achieved:

First Period (October 2014 – December 2014) - Work Plan Deliverable(s) for Period:



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1. Develop Request for Response (RFR) to announce the funded opportunity for Technical Support Consultants (TSCs) – December 2014

An RFR, announcing the TSC opportunity was drafted, outlining the details associated with the contract position(s) by December 2014. Job responsibilities were identified and listed as well as the qualifications, skills and tools necessary to perform the assigned tasks identified in the opportunity description. The initial work-plan identified the selection, contract acceptance and training of TSCs to be completed by May/June 2015. This target date was critical to ensure support for the 2015 specialty crop growing season, as well as scheduled program audits and technical assistance slated to take place during the late summer and autumn of the season. While this was an aggressive deployment timeline, six months was deemed plausible to deploy TSCs into the production space.

In spite of this critical timeline, the review, approval and public posting of the RFR (Request for Response) on the Massachusetts' Compass system, announcing the TSC opportunity, was delayed beyond the first period of the project because the Program Lead was unable to develop the RFR document. This six month delay occurred due to the issues requiring the Program Lead to be unable to complete the RFR per the original grant submission timeline.

The Development for the Request for Response (RFR) to announce the funded opportunity for Technical Support Consultants (TSCs) was delayed and moved into the second period of the work plan due to the above stated issues.

Initial Target Date:	December 2014
Revised Target Date:	June 2015
Completed:	July 2015

Second Period (December 2014 – June 2015) - Work Plan Deliverable(s) for Period:

1. Develop Request for Response (RFR) to announce the funded opportunity for Technical Support Consultants (TSCs) – June 2015 (Revised)
2. Post approved RFR to procurement website and distribute TSC opportunity in Massachusetts– January 2015
3. Select and hire candidates –February 2015
4. Conduct anticipated two week training workshop(s) –March 2015

In this period, we focused on managing the delay encountered during the first period and identified and hired selected TSCs. The initial RFR was posted for a 20 day cycle which ended with no desirable candidates for the position submitting responses to the request. It was decided that the RFR would be reposted at the end of the 2015 production year to facilitate TSCs deploying for the end of the 2016 growing season.

A possible future grant cycle delay also became apparent during this period as the program became aware of a possible FDA Financial Opportunity Announcement (FOA) for support of the Food Safety and Modernization Act's (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule. This created an unanticipated challenge as Program resources were redirected to evaluate this opportunity and assemble and submit a grant proposal. The Commonwealth Quality Program's current produce



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safety checklist is largely based upon the USDA GAPs program and has yet to incorporate emerging FSMA/PSR requirements into the program checklist utilized by auditors and future TSCs. The integration of the Produce Safety Rule requirements into the current program checklist was performed to offer a more reliable standards vehicle for specialty crop growers in Massachusetts.

The delays for posting, hiring and training during this period were used to update program requirements and fine tune TSC responsibilities under the initiative.

1. Develop Request for Response (RFR) to announce the funded opportunity for Technical Support Consultants (TSCs) – June 2015 (Revised)

Initial Target Date:	December 2014
Revised Target Date:	June 2015
Completed:	June 2015
2. Post approved RFR to procurement website and distribute TSC opportunity in Massachusetts– January 2015

Initial Target Date:	January 2015
Revised Target Date:	March 2016
Completed:	July 2015
3. Select and hire candidates –February 2015

Initial Target Date:	February 2015
Revised Target Date:	June 2016
Completed:	September 2016
4. Conduct anticipated two week training workshop(s) –March 2015

Initial Target Date:	March 2015
Revised Target Date:	September 2016
Completed:	September 2016

Third Period (June 2015-September 2016) - Work Plan Deliverable(s) for Period:

Posts approved RFR to procurement website and distribute TSC opportunity in Massachusetts– March 2016 (Revised)

1. Select and hire candidates –June 2016 (Revised)
2. Conduct anticipated two week training workshop(s) –September 2016
3. Deploy Regional Program TSCs – April 2015 through September 2017

All revised work plan targets were achieved during the third period of the project. TSC deployment will commence during the final quarter of 2016 and will continue throughout the 2017 production and harvest season. It is anticipated that only a partial spend of the initial budget of \$75,000.00 will be expended by the end of the project and the Department is evaluating the possible re-distribution of the anticipated remaining funds in 2017. Program Lead believed with selected RFR respondent hired funding would be spent out completely. Program Lead and Senior Staff at the Department met numerous times to discuss progress of this grant.

1. Post approved RFR to procurement website and distribute TSC opportunity in Massachusetts

Revised Target Date:	March 2016
Completed:	March 2016
2. Select and hire candidates



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- Revised Target Date: June 2016
Completed: June 2016
3. Conduct anticipated two week training workshop(s)
Revised Target Date: September 2016
Completed: September 2016
4. Deploy Regional Program TSCs – April 2015 through September 2017
Completed: September 2016-September 2017

All Work Periods (October 2014-September 2017)

Technical Assistance was provided to over 16 specialty crop producers in the fruit, vegetable and cranberry sectors in Massachusetts, including, but not limited to the agricultural operations listed below.

- White Barn Farm, Wrentham, Ma.
- Phoenix Farm, Belchertown, Ma.
- Under the Sun Farm, Dighton
- Four Town Farm, Seekonk, Ma.
- Manheim Farm, Hadley, Ma.
- Almeida Farm, Rehoboth, Ma.
- Makepeace Farms, Wareham, Ma.
- Fresh Meadows, Carver, Ma.
- Cabral Farm and Processing, Dighton, Ma.
- Mt. Warner Farm, Sunderland, Ma.
- Pioneer Valley Growers Association (PVGA) Copperative (Deerfield)
- Dargoonian Farms, Andover, Ma.
- Oakdale Farm, Rehoboth, Ma.
- The Farmer's Garden, Rehoboth, Ma.
- Galenski Farm, South Deerfield, Ma,
- Maple Row Farms, Shelburne Falls, Ma.

Technical Assistance included support in the following areas, as indicated in the initial request for the deployment of Program TSCs.

1. Deployed Technical Assistance for the development of food processing diversification strategies for farms seeking program inclusion.
2. Program training support for specialty crop growers for CQP/PSA training throughout the Commonwealth.
3. The coordination of nutrient and sediment reduction practices of wash ponds in support of program requirements
4. Technical assistance for specialty crop produce infrastructure upgrades in support of APR transfer.
5. Deployed Technical Assistance for the valuation & identification of potential food safety risks and potential solutions for pack lines, storage and transport of fresh fruits and vegetables in the Commonwealth.
6. The evaluation, modification and development of updates for program requirements, checklists, and supporting grower materials.



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7. Technical assistance and guidance for the process for acquiring quotes and work plans to support the applications for grant funds at addressing potential farm food safety and environmental practice risks (successful submission of over 10 grant requests, evaluation & needs assessments of grower requesting support, environmental & food safety compliance evaluation and assessment).

Problems and Delays:

As indicated previously, unanticipated programmatic resource issues along with turnover at the Department, had a profound impact on the initial stages of the project. The deployment of Produce Safety requirements under the FSMA/PSR also forced the internal review of listed farm food safety practices currently identified in the Commonwealth Quality Program and impacted both internal and external training curriculum and materials and dictated the Program to update program checklists and requirements. Even with this delay intended support was available throughout the 2017 growing season.

Beneficiaries:

Specialty-crop growers, buyers and MDAR partner organizations in Massachusetts.

- ☐ 25 Cranberry growers over the grant period
- ☐ 5 Produce growers over the grant period
- ☐ 3 buyers

Lessons Learned

A more detailed assessment of emerging requirements must be conducted to ensure a more timely deployment of work-plan deliverables. Unanticipated issues arose for key programmatic staff which made the project unable to be completed per the original grant submission. The Department has instituted a new system to ensure that applications which from staff assigned to other duties or who have known issues with grants management do not apply for future grant rounds.

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Organization:

Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources

Project Title:

GAP/GHP and Harmonized GAPs Cost Share Initiative for Massachusetts Specialty Crop Growers

Project Summary:

The purpose of the GAPs Cost Share Program is to provide specialty crop farm businesses in Massachusetts a partial reimbursement for fees associated with the conduct of a USDA GAPs/Harmonized GAPs audit as requested by farmers and/or buyers to support market access and revenue diversification.

Project Approach:

The project is a continuation of a prior SCBGF reward for GAP/GHP Cost Share that offsets the fees associated with a successful USDA GAP/Harmonized GAP Audit. A cost share package, including necessary forms and procedures for submitting a cost share application to the Department, have been created and dispersed through grower and partner networks in support of the initiative.

A baseline data was collected to determine which growers are new certification applicants. This will be used to monitor our progress towards our goal of increasing participation in USDA-sponsored third-party food safety audits. After reviewing the AMS listing available at the time, along with internal data, partner farms not currently participating in the GAPs audit program were identified, contacted and surveyed to establish a baseline of anticipated requests over the grant period. Based on this analysis a total number of 40 prospects were identified and materials were prepared to support targeted outreach for the prospect pool.

We partnered with UMass Extension and with auditors through the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources to perform outreach to interested growers. Cost share forms as well as an informational brochure, designed to address eligibility and assist growers with directions to support submission of the package, were developed and mailed. Packages were distributed between GAP auditors, UMASS Agricultural Extension agents as well as other MDAR stakeholders. The Cost Share program was posted on both the MDAR webpage and UMASS Agricultural Extension and was included in newsletters and e-newsletters sent out through partner organizations. Communications took place throughout the year but were sent on a more routine cycle during the off-season. Cost Share Packages were also sent to all certified growers requiring audits in the consequent cycle. Emails were also sent to prior year audit participants to inform them of the opportunity. All applicants requesting cost share were supported as the number of farms requesting cost share support were well below projections. Funds were disbursed across the grant period for all applicant submissions for the completion and pass of a successful audit. The numbers remained consistent over the grant period but churn occurred with many farms opting to drop certification and the marketing channel they supported. These were replaced with new growers mainly in the cranberry sector. By the end of the grant cycle numbers did drop off as less growers felt the necessity to maintain USDA GAP certification.



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Goals and Outcomes Achieved:

First Period (October 2014 – December 2014) - Work Plan Deliverable(s) for Period:

1. Collect Baseline Data– December 2014
In order to determine which growers are possible new certification applicants, we need to collect specialty crop baseline data. This will be performed by utilizing NASS data as well as internal Department information to determine how many growers are currently selling through wholesale channel and what the possible cost share coverage may be during the grant cycle. An analysis of current USDA GAP audited farms from prior operational years (2013, 2014) was also collected and reviewed as well as anticipated requests from buyers, processors and aggregators requiring certification as a condition of supply. Based on this analysis, the SCBGF funds requested and supplied should be sufficient to cover all GAP audit requests during the grant term.
Initial Target Date: December 2014
Completed: December 2014

Second Period (December 2014 – October 2017) - Work Plan Deliverable(s) for Period:

1. Conduct outreach to potential participants in the cost share program.
2. Record list of interested participants in the cost share program and send them application packages to participate in the program. – Completed
3. Disburse funds to eligible applicants. – Completed
4. Monitor success of the project at the end of each growing season. – Completed
During this period we supported the developed work-plan and promulgated the parameters of the GAP Cost Share Program and used farm information to mail forms for reimbursement. Forms and packages have been distributed through partners and agricultural organizations to facilitate uptake. Also, forms are included when invoices are sent to farms for USDA GAP/GHP audits conducted. Outreach phone calls as well as e-mails have been conducted and are continuing in support of the work plan.
We partnered with the UMass Extension Food Safety Education Program as they provided educational resources and outreach to growers across Massachusetts during the period of the grant. The UMass Extension has played a key role in educating specialty crop growers on the importance of food safety and on how changes in policy will affect them.

All Work Periods (October 2014-September 2017)

GAP/GHP Cost Share support was provided to over 22 specialty crop producers in the fruit, vegetable and cranberry sectors in Massachusetts.

Problems and Delays:

We did encounter delays in the promulgation of GAP Cost-share packages to participants due to staff turnover and reassignment in the initial stages of the project. This occurrence delayed scheduled GAP/GHP audits as well as supporting initiatives by several months. This delay was corrected and all tasks identified in the work plan were deployed and completed.

We also experienced a rapid decline in requests for GAP audits in the space with many specialty crop growers dropping USDA GAP audit coverage. We feel that this had to do with changing



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buyer requirements, the acceptance of the State's CQP program as an alternative, as well as emerging FDA FSMA Produce Safety requirements that are not in-line with current USDA GAP standards. It was anticipated and realized that further requests for cost share coverage continued throughout the remainder of the grant cycle but at a much reduced rate of uptake from our initial assessment. Requested funds were not fully expended at the end of the grant cycle and the Department was unable to re-use or reassign remaining funds.

Beneficiaries:

Specialty-crop growers, buyers and MDAR partner organizations in Massachusetts.

Lessons Learned

A more detailed assessment of emerging requirements, as well as internal Departmental operational cycles, must be conducted to ensure a more timely deployment of work-plan deliverables. Additionally, conflicting federal requirements in the space, coupled with buyer mergers and acquisitions in the qualified end retailer grouping created churn and requirements modification for market access in Massachusetts. This changing environment led to many growers dropping their anticipated requests for an audit and adversely affected the drawdown of the requested budget.

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Organization:

Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources

Project Title:

MDAR – “MassGrown & Fresher” Promotes Specialty Crops Phase II

Project Summary:

This project expanded outreach and education of Specialty Crops grown in Massachusetts by attending and staffing booths at unique industry conferences and events. The two targeted industry conferences were the MA Dietetic Conference and Concierge Association Annual Trade Show. Funding assisted us to expand our outreach to a professional trade audience. It also included funding to two other consumer shows.

The project expanded in 2017 with additional funding and scope by promoting Specialty Crops via poster advertisements on the Boston Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) commuter rail network.

Project Approach:

We ended up coordinating three booths at professional conferences: The 2016 and '17 Boston Concierge Association, the 2016 MA Dietetic Conference, and the 2017 MA Municipal Conference. The added consumer shows included the 10th annual 2017 Boston Green Fest and the 2017 North Quabbin Garlic and Arts Festival. 40k posters were designed and produced. 750 maple syrup samples, 1200 apples were purchased as well as 1000 dried cranberries were donated to the project. Samples and posters were given out at each of the shows. We even had MDAR purchased honeybee tattoos as an added giveaway at the booths.

We contracted with MBTA to produce and install 420 poster cards on trains throughout the Boston Commuter rail system in September, 2017.

Goals and Outcomes Achieved:

Goals were met w/ regards to the printed posters (Exhibit 1). We actually produced many more than we thought from initial estimates. With regards to samples for our booth, we were happy to offer these as a sample of Specialty Crops at the various events. We were even more grateful from the MA Cranberry Association who offered over 1000 sampled dried cranberries (info and recipe cards) to be given out along with the paid maple samples and apples.

The proposal goal was to reach (sign up) 100 people at the professional industry trade shows. We ended up with 194 in total from the three conferences. Over the course of the year, we sent four seasonal e-blasts to them (sample - Exhibit 2). We then surveyed the 194 contacts to measure impact (Exhibit 3). From the 194, we had a survey response of 12% (24). Of those, the key question for us, was the referrals. 12 (of the 24) responded in referring our SCrop information to others: 7 (58%) referred 1-5 people, 3 (25%) 6-20 people, and 2 (17%) referred from 20-100 other people (Exhibit 5).



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We also attended grant funded consumer shows, the 10th annual 2017 Boston Green Fest and the 2017 North Quabbin Garlic and Arts Festival. But we also attended many other consumer shows with materials provided in this grant: The Boston Flower Show (estimate attendance 15k), The Big E (over 1.5 million), as well as regional fairs throughout the state. Over the course of the grant, we have added over 700 new consumer emails.

With regards to the poster (Exhibit 4) campaign on the MBTA, the measurable we received from the MBTA is approximately 714,660 impressions from riders for the month of September. We looked at our website to see if we could see a spike that month in comparison to last year (when there was no advertisement). Using Google analytics, we saw an increase to www.Mass.gov/Massgrown from 715 unique views to 1384 for the month of Sept. 2017, for a 94% increase. The month earlier, August, without the ads had increased 56%. It's hard to contribute all of that to the advertisements, but it was encouraging information.

Long-Term Outcomes

Our plan is to continue our seasonal e-blasts to those that have signed up. Between this project and our past "Massgrown" project, we have seen the research and heard anecdotes, such as "oh ya, we have bookmarked that website!" That encourages us to continue pursuing more email sign-ups to then send the fresh seasonal email updates on the Specialty Crops we have to offer in the Commonwealth.

Beneficiaries:

The over 700 retail farms selling Specialty Crops highlighted on our "Massgrown" map. I believe the person to person outreach and sampling at our booths has brought extra attention to maple syrup producers, cranberry, and apple growers.

We also continued to spotlight individual growers by adding each month a new a Specialty Crop's grower on our "Faces of Agriculture" website. Specialty crop growers are also a beneficiary with regards to the newly designed posters. They were designed to be attractive to the public, professionals, and for growers to add to their farm stands. They have been added to our list of offerings to growers at no charge: www.mass.gov/eea/docs/agr/markets/docs/pop-orderform.pdf.

Lessons Learned

With regards to attending events: For the minimum cost of booth fees and the matching time investment, I feel in the long term, it is a success by attending either a professional conference or other food or flower related event or festival. I am still amazed at the ability of gaining pages of hand written emails with a sample, smile and greeting, offering seasonal emails to keep them updated with events, places, recipes, and Specialty Crop farms to visit.

With regards to promoting on the MBTA, it's hard to translate to sales of Specialty crops, but the number of impressions that can be made at a key time of the year can make a big visual impact. As studies show, the key to promoting is to reach the public in various ways and methods, and these grants have helped us use varying methods.

Based on feedback and surveys, we are even now collaborating with the education sector (state agencies and non-profits) to search out teacher conferences to outreach to. With over 950,000 students throughout 405 school districts, this gives us another avenue in reaching families to educate and promote Specialty Crops and farms near them. I also intend to follow up more with the Dietitians we connected with. They seemed to have the most interest in our information. Many of them work in a health sector and have the ability to outreach to many more people!

Additional Information

Exhibit 1



Exhibit 2

MassGrown and Fresher News – Spring is in the Air with a Taste of Maple and the Scent of

Flowers!



Spring forward this month with a taste of our first agricultural product of the season – 100% pure Massachusetts Maple

Syrup. With the ups and downs of our temperatures, our maple producers are working hard to tap thousands of maple trees across the Commonwealth. Monday, Governor Baker Declared March “Massachusetts Maple Month.” We are happy to feature Dana Goodfield from Conway as our “Face of Agriculture” this month.



Photo by Deb LeRay
 Sweetwater Sugarhouse, Royalston

Find a Maple Sugar House near you; serving a delicious pancake breakfast with all the fixing’s and of course plenty of Maple Syrup! After you have some maple syrup from your trip, try our “Recipe of the Month”: Maple Cheesecake with Sour Cream Topping.

While you can find a complete list of seasonal events on the **MassGrown and Fresher Calendar**, below is a sweet sample of what's happening across Massachusetts. Be sure to check with the organizer's website beforehand, for any last minute changes.

-
- **Natick** - March 5 - Maple Magic
 - **Rutland** – March 5, 6, 12, & 13 - Pancakes on the Farm
 - **Topsfield** - March 5, 6, 12, & 13 – Weekend Maple Sugaring Tours
 - **Lincoln** – March 12 & 13 – Sap to Syrup Farmer's Breakfast
 - **West Springfield** – March 13 - Storowton Village Museum's annual Maple Harvest Day
 - **Shelburne** – March 20 – Maple Sugaring Open House
 - **March 19 & 20** - 3rd Annual Massachusetts Maple Weekend
 - **Weston** - March 26 – Sugaring Off Festival



We also welcome spring each year with the opening of **The Boston Flower & Garden Show** at the Seaport World Trade Center. From March 16 – 20, join us along with hundreds of garden and flower vendors, not to be missed garden and landscape exhibits & countless events and activities.



Exhibit 3 (Sample Email)

Dear Conference Attendee:

Last year, the Massachusetts Dept. of Agricultural Resources (MDAR), had a “Massgrown and Fresher” informational booth at the Annual MMA Conference in Norton.

You might have left a card, email, spoke to myself, or one of my colleagues at the event.

Please take a moment to fill out our quick 2 minute survey. Survey link:
<https://goo.gl/forms/xbagL0hH3dfiCHXJ2>

We will send out a small honey bear (locally produced) or the 2018 Massachusetts

Agriculture Calendar as an incentive to fill out the survey.

Thanks!

Rick LeBlanc



Exhibit 4



Exhibit 5

	Since the Annual Mtg. in May, did you at any point visit our website, mass.gov/massgrown, as a result of visiting our "Massgrown and fresher" booth?	If yes, how frequently have you visited the website?	Have you received at least one of the seasonal "Massgrown & fresher" e-newsletters over the course of the past year?	If yes, did any of the e-newsletters prompt you to visit our "Massgrown" website?	Did any of these emails or materials from our booth prompt you to share the "Massgrown" website to clients or consumers you serve?	If yes, estimate number of referrals.
Boston Concierge Conference						
	yes	Only once	no	no	yes	6-20
	no		no		no	
	yes	Only once	yes	no	no	
	no		yes	no	no	
	yes	Only once	no	yes	no	
	yes	Monthly	no	no	yes	1-5
	yes	Monthly	yes	yes	yes	6-20
Dietetic Conference						
	yes	Only once	no	no	yes	1-5
	yes	Only once	no		yes	1-5
	no		no		no	
	yes	Only once	no			
	yes	Only once	no	no	yes	1-5
	no		no	no	no	
	yes	Monthly	no		yes	20-100



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	yes	Monthly	no	did not receive E-news	yes	20-100
	yes	Monthly	no	no	yes	6-20
	yes	Only once	no	did not receive	no	
MMA Conference						
	no		yes	yes	yes	1-5
	yes	Only once	yes	yes	yes	1-5
	yes	Only once	yes	don't remember	yes	1-5
	no		yes	yes	no	

Contact Person

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Organization:

MA Nursery & Landscape Association and MA Flowers Growers Association

Project Title:

Development and Implementation of Statewide Green Industry Promotional Events in MA

Project Summary:

Plant Something MA is focused on building the environmental horticulture industry in the Commonwealth. Horticulture is our states' number one agricultural commodity. The economic downturn over the past decade has resulted in decreased sales. If we are to support locally produced products and rebuild sales, we need to continue to find innovative ways of reaching out to and educating consumers. We developed this program to capture the national wave toward "green" solutions and shopping locally.

The project developed a seasonally based statewide open house campaign to increase sales of nursery, floriculture and horticulture crops. It also featured industry education on how to best utilize branding and key messaging when trying to attract and retain customers. Finally, the project developed educational materials to be used for youth programs to promote the health and environmental benefits of plants. Our project goal was a 5% increase in gross sales of eligible products.

Project Approach:

The Massachusetts Nursery and Landscape Association (MNLA) and Massachusetts Flower Growers' Association (MFGA) represent greenhouse growers, turf growers, nurseries, and growers of indoor and outdoor vegetable and herb plants and flowers. The Plant Something MA campaign is focused on building the state's green infrastructure by creating an environmental movement that will lead to additional revenues for the industry in Massachusetts. Baseline data collected through the Plant Something MA campaign thus far indicate a high consumer demand for locally sourced plant material, technical expertise and general horticultural information. The components of the proposed project will build upon the success of the initial campaign, while working towards the central goal of increasing the competitiveness and long term sustainability of specialty crops in Massachusetts.

Background: The Massachusetts Nursery and Landscape Association (MNLA) and Massachusetts Flower Growers' Association (MFGA) represent greenhouse growers, turf growers, nurseries, and growers of indoor and outdoor vegetable and herb plants and flowers. The Plant Something MA campaign is focused on building the state's green infrastructure by creating an environmental movement that will lead to additional revenues for the industry in Massachusetts. Baseline data collected through the Plant Something MA campaign thus far indicate a high consumer demand for locally sourced plant material, technical expertise and general horticultural information. The components of the proposed project will build upon the success of previous campaigns, while working towards the central goal of increasing the competitiveness and long term sustainability of specialty crops in Massachusetts.



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This project is of utmost importance to help the industry to continue to rebuild after a decade of economic downturn. The timeliness is evidenced by the national wave toward “green” solutions and shopping locally. The specialty crops sellers and growers need to capitalize on this wave if they are to stay economically viable. The Plant Something MA campaign has made great strides over the past two years with regards to increasing consumer awareness of the health, environmental and economic benefits of plants. The proposed project will expand the original Plant Something MA campaign to include seasonally based statewide open house style events, thus increasing direct sales opportunities for industry professionals. It also expands the education component to include branding and marketing strategies for businesses to implement to best utilize the program. The final component captures the next generation of customers through educational opportunities.

The project had four main objectives:

- Develop promotional resource toolkits for industry professionals
- Train industry professionals in the use of key messages and marketing strategies that attract buyers who have local purchase preferences
- Engage more green industry professionals to participate in and promote the Plant Something MA campaign
- Develop educational materials for distribution at local schools in collaboration with buy local and agricultural education organizations

While this proposal builds upon the success of a previously funded Specialty Crop Block Grant, this is a new project. Plant Something MA has established financial sustainability as a goal for the program. Through sponsorship development, we plan to transition the program into being self-sustaining in the future.

This project was not been submitted to or funded by another Federal or State grant programs.

Project Approach: Program Coordinator in conjunction with Executive Director of MNLA – implementation of work plan developed by the Plant Something MA Task Force including:

- Development of Task Force meeting agendas; compilation and distribution of meeting notes; grant management including reporting and data collection;
- Program information and recruitment presentations at MFWGA Annual Meeting and MNLA/MCH professional development meetings in preparation for seasonal events
- Seasonal event coordination included New England Grows trade show, Boston Flower and Garden Show, Down to Earth “Summer Conference”, Plant Something May 15, and fall program
- Community organization outreach – electronic and telephone communication
- Coordination and development of materials to be posted to the PlantSomethingMA.org and the MNLA.com website.
- Daily management of social media accounts including post development, cross posting relevant content, program promotion
- Coordination of keynote speakers content including interviews of members



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- Baseline data collection
- Promotion and distribution of Toolkit items through email notifications, speaking engagements and tabling events
- Wrote and distributed education materials on a monthly basis, May 2016-October 2016
- Coordinated volunteers for 2016 Boston Flower Show exhibit (spring event)
- Attended 2016 Boston Flower Show
- Developed and distributed the 2016 and 2017 Plant Something MA quiz

Lead administration of the project is done by the Project Coordinator with full coordination with the Executive Director, MNLA and the Executive Secretary of the MFGA.

Project oversight was done by members of the Plant Something MA Task Force. The Task Force is comprised of members of MNLA and MFGA, along with staff support from both organizations. The Task Force meets in person, as well as via electronic communication, to develop and refine the work plan for the project. Modifications are made as necessary, based on the outcome of planned events. For this reporting period, the Task Force conducted face to face meetings on the following dates as well as email/conference call communications.

A member of the Task Force, who is also a member of MFGA, spearheaded the promotion, production and distribution of the seed kits.

Dr. Nora Ganim Barnes conducted the economic impact study. Dr. Barnes earned a Ph.D. in Consumer Behavior from the University of Connecticut and is a Chancellor Professor of Marketing and Director of the Center for Marketing Research at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth.

Goals and Outcomes Achieved:

Our overall project goal was to increase consumption of annuals, perennials, edibles, trees, shrubs and bedding plants through the Plant Something MA campaign. There were many methods to measure our progress with the campaign and the grant, such as, quiz responses, Boston Flower Show attendance and engagement, and school kit distributed.

GOAL 1: Develop and implement seasonally based statewide open house Plant Something MA events to increase sales of nursery, floriculture and horticulture crops

Plant Something MA had an exhibit booth at the Boston Flower Show in March 2015 and March 2016. During the 2015 Boston Flower Show more than 50,162 attended this annual event with more than 6,000 attendees planting a mystery seed (specialty crop plants) in a cup with soil.

Plant Something Massachusetts also exhibited at the Boston Flower Show in March 2016. Roughly 8,000 attendees walked through our booth and planted a mystery plant (a marigold) in a cup of soil.

In both years, attendees were asked to go back to the Plant Something MA website to learn what they planted and how to plant and care for their new plant. Between March 1 and April 30,



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2016, there were over 10,000 page views of this webpage. Unfortunately, there was a glitch in setting up the website analytics prior to this time, so Plant Something MA doesn't have any data on how popular our outreach was for the 2015 Boston Flower Show. However, when conversing with booth attendees, they clearly remember our booth and told us what they received for a seed in 2015. Booth attendees were excited to see us and "report in" about prior plantings!

GOAL 2: Educate industry professionals on branding/marketing strategies to best utilize the Plant Something MA campaign materials

To meet the goal of educating industry professionals on the branding/marketing strategies, during the spring of 2016, Sirius Design and the Project Coordinator designed a monthly email newsletter that is distributed to all MNLA and MFGA members about how to use the Plant Something MA campaign, the toolkit, and our social media platforms to their advantage. We continuously update the mailing list with new members and/or marketing employees of our members. The newsletter is well received, as evident by the open rate which is always over the 19.6% industry open rate!

Month	Number of Recipients	Open Rate
May 2016	693	35%
June 2016	637	32%
August 2016	636	29%
September 2016	640	35%
October 2016	599	30%
December 2016	593	25%
February 2017	854	35%
May 2017	818	33%
June 2017	813	28%

In May 2016, the Task Force, Program Coordinator and Sirius Design (our webmaster/designer) also designed a Resource Guide for members. We uploaded the Resource Guide to our website that is only accessible by MNLA and MFGA members. We continuously educate members at events and newsletters about the Resource Guide. We take sections and advice from the Resource Guide to produce articles for the above mentioned email newsletters.

GOAL 3: Develop youth education and outreach materials

During March 2017, we attended a Massachusetts Agriculture in the Classroom event and offered our program to distribute seed kits to students. It was eye opening and we received an overwhelming response. 100% of the teachers attending the event wanted our piloted seed kit! As a result of the response, we provided 30 kits to a school for an "in-service day." During the 2017 Boston Flower Show, we collected over 150 orders for a seed kit (while distributing 60 kits on site). We learned from our seed kit promotion and distribution that there is an unmet need and demand from teachers and educators to teach more about gardening and agriculture. There was an overwhelming response. We believe that students will bring home their seed kit and new love



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for plants and will talk and inspire their parents to plant something. Those parents will drive traffic to garden centers and nurseries.

Each seed kit contained 32 pots, 32 matching peat pellets, a box, seeds, and instruction sheet. This would be the kit that is distributed to educators, scout leaders and schools. The seeds were specialty crops.

Performance Measurements

Our overall performance measure was gross sales receipts of specialty crops with a target of a 5% increase in gross sales.

Performance Measurement #1: An Economic Study

To measure the economic impact of the Massachusetts Green Industry on the Commonwealth, a survey was conducted of those working in the green industry (not just members) via mail and through an online survey program. The study was based on gross sales and could be compared to the 2009 economic study sponsored by New England Nursery Association conducted by University of Vermont Extension and University of Maine Cooperative Extension.

A hard copy of the 2016 survey was mailed to 576 industry members (with a prepaid postage envelope) who only had a mailing address and no email address. An electronic copy of the survey was sent to 688 industry members and reminders were sent out periodically. In addition a range of questions were asked to determine trends in taxes paid, payroll changes and the impact of industry issues on companies. The mailing went out on February 25, 2016 and the survey remained open until May 2, 2016. Fifty-two percent (103) of the surveys were mailed back and 48% (94) were taken online. All the data was about their business in 2015.

- Of the 1,264 members contacted, 197 responded, yielding a response rate of 16%.
- 61% of companies sold plants in 2015.
- 36% of employees are year round full-time employees, 8% are year round part-time employees, 32% are full-time seasonal employees and 24% are part-time seasonal employees. If hiring were possible, it would primarily be filled with full-time seasonal employees.
- 56% report their company's payroll has increased.
- 43% of companies held acreage in 2015.
- 76% of acreage held in 2015 was in agricultural production, 61% open space, 10% land preservation and 33% in a variety of other uses.
- 29% of companies occupied greenhouse space.
- The highest impact issues for companies include healthcare (44%), labor issues (42%) and energy issues (28%).
- 58% of companies report their gross income has increased in the last 3 years (2012-2015).
- The total economic impact of the Massachusetts Green Industry is \$5.2B. Whereas the 2009 study reported, the estimated value in Massachusetts for 2007 was 2.631 billion in gross income.



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Performance Measurement #2: A Consumer Survey

Furthermore, through a Plant Something MA Quiz, we collected purchasing data from consumers in October 2016 and October 2017. The Project Coordinator created a quiz to assess consumer spending. The quiz was posted on the Plant Something website in March 2016 and promoted on Facebook, Twitter and tabling events. We also reached out to our partners and asked them to share our social media posts related to the Quiz. The Project Coordinator sent an “End of the Season Survey” to those that took the quiz to measure the increase in knowledge and engagement with specialty crops. We repeated this exercise in 2017

2016 Quiz & Survey Results

- 468 people took the quiz between March and October 2016.
- A majority of quiz takers spend \$200-\$499 per year on their garden
- 56 people took the “End of the Season Survey”; however, only 50 of those responses were viable for comparison purposes.
- Of the 50 viable “End of the Season Survey” results, we found:
 - 14% bumped themselves up a garden level, for example from beginner to intermediate
 - 52% increased their garden space
 - 44% increase their spending on garden purchases

2017 Quiz & Survey Results

- 267 people took the quiz between March and October 2017.
- A majority of quiz takers spend \$200-\$499 per year on their garden
- 27 people took the “End of the Season Survey”
- From the “End of the Season Survey” results, we found:
 - 10% bumped themselves up a garden level, for example from beginner to intermediate
 - 63% increased their garden space
 - 33% increase their spending on garden purchases

While the quiz did collect data on spending, space and gardening expertise, it was difficult to narrow down their spending as a consumer on each plant or specialty crop. As such, we do not have that level of data.

Performance Measurement #3: A Member Survey

To measure the outcome of this goal, we also surveyed members on knowledge of the Plant Something MA and how it can be applied to increase their individual businesses. The outreach to members for survey feedback began via email & website June 2015 and ran through August 2015. An onsite option was added on July 2015 at a summer conference to capture additional data to take advantage of the educational programs focus of marketing and sales of specialty crops. We determined based on 500 attending the conference that more than 60% of MFGA and MNLA members polled were not aware of the program in its entirety. They knew it existed “somehow” but didn’t relate it directly to their membership or how it was of value if they were not a garden center. 40% of those polled took advantage of the program in some way and were aware of its benefits.

Comparison of Set Goals & Achieved Goals

Project Activity	Staff	Timeline	Status
In person and teleconference meetings – develop toolkit materials; provide program oversight	Plant Something MA Task Force Plant Something Program Coordinator	Monthly October 2014 – September 2015; January 2016, September 2016, & March 2016	This task has been executed as outlined. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings • Oversight • Tool kit in progress
Baseline Sales Data Collection	Plant Something Program Coordinator	October 2014	Collected at the Summer Conference 7/15
Development of Toolkit items	Plant Something MA Task Force Plant Something Program Coordinator	December 2014 – February 2015	Developed over Spring 2016 and released May 2016
Development of Educational Materials	Plant Something Program Coordinator	January 2015 – March 2015	Monthly: May 2016 – October 2016
Distribution of Toolkit and Educational Materials	Plant Something Program Coordinator	May – September 2015	Ongoing since May 2016
Spring Plant Something Event	Plant Something Program Coordinator	May 2015	One event completed in March 2015; a second completed in March 2016
Summer Plant Something Event Sales Data Collection	Plant Something Program Coordinator	June – July 2015	One event completed in July where sales data was collected 7/2015
Marketing Keynote Speaker	Plant Something Task Force Program Coordinator	July 2015	Completed 7/2015
Fall Plant Something Event Sales Data Collection	Plant Something Program Coordinator	September – October 2015	Through a “Quiz” we collected purchasing data from consumers in October 2016 and October 2017.
Final Data Collection and Reporting	Plant Something Program Coordinator	November 2014 – February 2016	Data collection about the 2015 business year collected February to May 2016

Beneficiaries:

Wholesale and retail nursery, floriculture and horticulture crop producers benefited from the project.

There are more than 5,100 horticulture-related businesses within Massachusetts. Wholesale and retail producer members of both organizations exceed 300 businesses. A campaign focused on local resources of plant material and technical experts has the potential to positively impact the entire horticultural specialty crop industry. Additionally, all materials and programs created by Plant Something MA are shared with our fellow national Plant Something program participants. As a result, our project will benefit additional nursery, floriculture and horticulture specialty crop producers in ten other states.



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In the long run, all specialty crop growers and sellers will benefit from this campaign, even beyond our membership, since it is intended to elevate consumers' awareness about the value of green plants for the air we breathe, the food we eat, the flowers we love. This project enhances and expands on the current Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources programs of "Mass Grown" and "Buy Local" to include the nursery, greenhouse, landscape and floriculture segments of the industry. Increased sales as a result of our promotional efforts will benefit wholesale and retail producers.

Economic Impact

We learned from our first performance measurement, the economic study on economic happenings in 2015, that for every dollar of output generated by the industry, an estimated total of \$1.73 worth of economic activity is generated in Massachusetts. For every additional full-time employee hired, 1.4 jobs are created and every \$1 spent by the industry on labor, generated \$1.50 in wages in Massachusetts.

Based on the data, we estimate that the output of the Green Industry in Massachusetts is valued at approximately \$3B in 2015, which in turn generated approximately \$5.2B in the Massachusetts economy, or 1.73 times the activity.

The Green Industry was responsible for 35,374 direct jobs in 2015 and also generated an additional 13,398 jobs through indirect and induced activity, resulting in a total of 48,772 jobs in Massachusetts. Companies in the Green Industry paid \$1.65B in wages and benefits which generated and impact of \$2.5B in other indirect and induced labor costs.



Lessons Learned

Through the grant, we recognized that reaching the consumer audience was actually easier in small quantities than building the awareness of the program to members who are already consumed with their businesses, often not having the resources to take on the campaign and incorporating it into their daily operations. Thus future grants have focused on new consumer populations.

Contact Person

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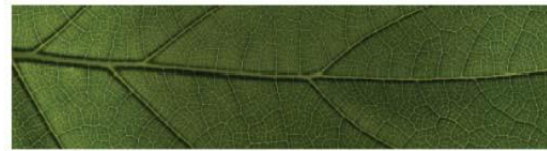
Exhibits

2016 Resource Guide

marketing tips for our members

A joint publication of Massachusetts Flower Growers' Association and Massachusetts Nursery and Landscapers Association.



grow your business with Plant Something Massachusetts!

How can you get your existing customers to be more loyal? How can you inspire non-gardeners to plant something for the first time? Give them more reasons to plant something!

Except for food gardening, average household spending on gardening is decreasing and gardeners' average age is increasing. The green industry needs to attract more Millennials (ages 18-34). Research shows that younger gardeners view planting as hard and expensive. Lack of time, space, and knowledge is deterring them from gardening.

We've got to make it easier and more appealing for our customers to enjoy plants, especially if they have limited space. And we need to make it easier for them to find us—Massachusetts flower growers, independent garden centers and landscapers—to assist them if they need help.

The solution: *Plant Something Massachusetts!*

Plant Something Massachusetts encourages state residents to enjoy the health, environmental and economic benefits of planting.

We promote planting through our website (plantsomethingma.org), our weekly "Gardening in Massachusetts" tips (promoted through social media), our participation in the Boston Flower & Garden Show, and the work of our members throughout the state.

This year, we're focusing on getting people to Plant Something for Pollinators.

Appeal: Even non-gardeners understand the value of having birds, bees, butterflies and other pollinators around. And everyone eats! When people hear that 75 percent of food crops are dependent on pollinators, they want to know what they can do.

Publicity: Government agencies, organizations, websites, and our industry are spreading the word about the urgent need to address the pollinator decline. Yet, there's no statewide group that's coordinating efforts to plant something for pollinators in Massachusetts.

Why pollinators?

Need: Our ecosystem, our food supply, and our industry all depend on pollinators to enable plants to reproduce. Yet the pollinator population is in decline, due to loss of habitat, invasive species, climate change and overuse of pesticides.

Promote pollinators and your business at the same time.

Plant Something Massachusetts is a consumer marketing campaign to promote the value of the green industry. The purpose of this resource guide is to help you attract customers (especially Millennials) with events, signage, social media and other tools.

Plant Something Massachusetts is a partnership project of Massachusetts Flower Growers Association and Massachusetts Nursery and Landscapers Association.



Pledge to Plant Something for Pollinators

We're asking Massachusetts residents to pledge to Plant Something for Pollinators. If everyone planted just one plant that attracts pollinators, pollinators would make a "beeline" to our state.

Every time someone fills out the pledge form on our website, their town gets highlighted on this state map. We'll encourage people to ask their friends and neighbors to plant something, too. The more people from that town who pledge, the darker the color gets.

May 15 is the kick-off date because that's when most people start planting. In addition, Plant Something MA has led a campaign for the past few years to encourage every city and town in the commonwealth to Plant Something on or around May 15. Hundreds of garden clubs, schools, landscapers, garden centers and individuals

have heeded our call to make our state healthier and more beautiful while we grow the Massachusetts economy.

Asking people to visit the website and pledge to plant at least one pollinator-friendly plant gives people a concrete action.

We're connecting environmental groups, birding groups, farm-to-school organizations, and others to ask them to spread the word. We hope to get even non-gardeners to participate.

We're asking everyone in Massachusetts to plant at least one pollinator-friendly plant this year.



Plant Something Massachusetts is a partnership project of Massachusetts Flower Growers Association and Massachusetts Nursery and Landscapers Association.



Let's cross-pollinate!

Our Plant Something for Pollinators campaign gives you the chance to do something beneficial for our industry and the ecosystem while helping your own business. Since it makes sense to plant a lot of locally grown, native plants to attract pollinators, we'll encourage consumers to support you, their local, independent garden centers, landscapers, and flower growers.

This Resource Guide suggests six ways you can use this campaign, but we encourage you to share your ideas with us, so we can let other members know what works. In addition to this guide, we

have additional resources for you, such as downloadable, customizable signs and flyers. (To access these free members-only resources, visit plantsomethingma.org/membersonly.)

Need some consumer-friendly info about what is a pollinator or how to plant a pollinator garden? [Plantsomethingma.org](http://plantsomethingma.org) has a list of mostly native pollinator-friendly plants that grow well in Massachusetts that you can use and download or share with customers. Feel free to use any of the text on plantsomethingma.org. Just provide a link to our website, if you can.



TIP: Offer a free pollinator plant with any purchase. Place a stake or postcard in or next to the plant that explains that there is a pollinator crisis and how planting this plant can help.

1. Provide and promote pollinator-friendly plants and other products

Obviously, if you want to promote planting for pollinators, you'll need to have a good selection of pollinator-friendly plants on hand. The best pollinator gardens are planted with a variety of colors, with blooms that peak from the earliest part of the season until the end.

Stock as many locally grown, flowering plants that are native to Massachusetts as possible. Choose species that are naturally resistant to pests.

Place a sign by your birdhouses and other water containers that reminds consumers

that pollinators need water, too. Or display a birdhouse alongside a grouping of pollinator-friendly plants.

Place a sign by your birdhouses, bee nests, or butterfly houses that reminds consumers that pollinators need shelter for nesting and seasonal protection. Or display a bee house alongside a grouping of pollinator-friendly plants.

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2. Displays

Many consumers may not know which plants attract pollinators or what a vast array of plants are pollinator-friendly. Since we're particularly interested in attracting young, beginning gardeners who are less likely to be home owners, we recommend that you feature pollinator-friendly container gardens.

Display individual containers, each featuring a single, easy-care, pollinator-friendly native plant, in a prominent area. If possible, provide information about which pollinator each plant will attract. Display potting soil, fertilizer, and a spade next to the containers. You may

TIP: Don't overwhelm beginning gardeners with too big a selection or too much information. Set them up for success with your most popular and hardiest pollinator plants.

potting soil, fertilizer, and planting tips. You may want to call it a Plant Something for Pollinators Window Box/Balcony/Dock Kit. Charge a flat fee for the kit, and promote it in your social media. You could also hold a drawing to win a free kit.

If you have room, plant a 10'x20' garden bed with native pollinator-friendly plants, a water feature, and a nesting area to demonstrate the elements of a full-size

TIP: Create already planted "Plant Something for Pollinators" containers that customers who don't want to plant it themselves can pick up and take right to check-out.

want to call it a Plant Something for Pollinators Starter Kit. Charge a flat fee for the kit, and promote it in your social media. You could also hold a drawing to win a free kit.

Create a display grouping of three to five containers, showcasing pollinators that bloom at different times, along with

pollinator garden. You may want to call this a Plant Something for Pollinators Yard Kit. Provide customers with a plant list for a good pollinator mix. Promote your own landscaping services for those who don't have the time or skills to plant their own pollinator garden, or suggest another landscaper who can assist them.

Plant Something Massachusetts is a partnership project of Massachusetts Flower Growers Association and Massachusetts Nursery and Landscape Association.



3. Signage

Use bench cards, POP materials, banners, hanging tags, stickers, and other signage to educate your customers about the decline in the pollinator population and let them know that their actions can make a difference.

You can add the Plant Something for Pollinators logo to your bench cards for each of your pollinator-friendly plants or other pollinator products, print out our Pledge to Plant Something for Pollinators signs and display them at check-out, or print

some of our colorful pollinator facts/signage. (To access these free members-only resources, visit plantsomethingma.org/membertools.)

You can also download and print our color postercard, which asks consumers to Plant Something for Pollinators and direct them to the plantsomethingma.org website to pledge.

Garden Center Marketing sells a variety of customizable pollinator signage at gardencentermarketing.com/pages/Pollinator-Garden-Challenge-Signage.

TIP: Display signs or pollinator-friendly plants next to edibles explaining that most food plants need pollinators to reproduce.



Plant Something Massachusetts is a partnership project of Massachusetts Flower Growers Association and Massachusetts Nursery and Landscape Association.



Open House For Butterflies

(It's Back & Even Bigger This Year!)

date and time here
location address here here

TIP: Schedule your event for a public occasion, such as Mother's Day, Father's Day, Earth Day, or National Pollinator Week. When your event is tied to a holiday or special day, it's easier to attract websites and newspapers to publicize and cover it.



4. Events

Events are a great way to build loyalty with your regular customers as well as to attract new customers.

Plan a "plant something" event, where people plant a terrarium while drinking and socializing. Millennials tend to be idealistic, so even if they're not gardeners, they're likely to be attracted by the opportunity of taking a small action to make a difference. Introduce gardeners who feel they still have something to learn will enjoy increasing their skills, whereas your "expert" gardeners love to show off what they know.

Hold a "Plant Something for Pollinators" event at your garden center or in partnership with a landscaper member or community group. Make it a 2+ event featuring wine and refreshments, or promote it as a parent and child friendly activity. Charge a flat fee, and let participants pick their plants and containers, plant them, socialize, learn some gardening and pollinator tips, and take their containers home.

Visit plantsomethingma.org/membertools to download and customize our pre-designed Pollinator Event flyer.

5. Community

It's much easier to partner with existing groups that have their own members or supporters than to do this all on your own.

Find a local organization to partner with, such as a beekeeper association, horticulture school, garden club, botanical garden, or 4-H group. They may be willing to volunteer to staff your event or invite you to speak to their group. Even your local Chamber of Commerce may be receptive to sponsoring a pollinator garden in a public place in your community.

The majority of Massachusetts schools have a school garden, an environmental group, or some type of farm-to-school program. While working with schools may not directly pay more sales, it will increase your community profile. If you're already working with a local school, a parent/child pollinator event or invite you to speak. It's easier to get publicity if you are connected with a school.

TIP: Go to MeetUp.com to search for a local group, a social networking group for under 40s, a birding group, an environmental group, or other likely MeetUps in your area that might want to cosponsor your Pollinator Event.

Plant Something Massachusetts is a partnership project of Massachusetts Flower Growers Association and Massachusetts Nursery and Landscape Association.



6. Social media

Any of the tactics above can have a much greater impact on your business if you use social media to spread the word. The biggest challenge to social media is trying to get a lot of people to see and respond to your posts. Here are a few suggestions for getting your posts seen, as well as some sample posts.

Connect your accounts
Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are still the biggest social media platforms. If you have a presence on more than one of these, connect them. That means sharing Instagram posts on your Facebook account or putting links to your Twitter and Instagram accounts on your Facebook page.

Use hashtags
A hashtag is a word or phrase with the # symbol in front of them (no spaces in between the words), like #PlantSomethingMA. People who are interested in a subject can use hashtags to find posts on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.

In addition to the names and hashtags you use for your business, please use hashtag #PlantSomething4Pollinators, and our Plant Something handle, @plantsomethingMA. This will help others find you and Plant Something MA to promote you.

Instagram uses a lot of hashtags, so when posting there, you can also use #BeTheChange, #BringBackTheBees, and #MoreBeesMoreFood.

Use visual content
Social media users love visual content. They're more likely to share your post if there's a cool picture or video inolved. Ask your customers to share photos of their pollinator plants, take pictures of your own displays, or share a picture of

a DIY project by an employee. We have some free photos and social media posts you can use at plantsomethingma.org/membertools.



Follow and share other people's content
Follow the social media accounts of all of the customers and community groups you know. Comment to and share their posts as much as you can. When you like, comment and share other people's posts, they're highly likely to follow and share your content, too.

TIP: Use the Events function on Facebook to promote your event. It makes it easy for your followers to accept the invite, invite others, and add it to their calendar.



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Handling questions about pesticides

These pesticides is a hot button issue that some of our customers may raise. Each garden center and landscaper will have different practices and opinions, so here's how to make those conversations grow your business instead of turning into an angry homes' nest.

Provide knowledge, not opinion. Providing your customer with facts so they can make their own decision is a tried and true approach many small businesses use when dealing with contested issues. If they do ask what you're specifically doing, however, you should be prepared to share your policies and practices.

If they ask, "Are pesticides killing bees/pollinators?" you might want to say that scientists are studying the impact that pesticides have on bees and other pollinators. Pesticides may be one of a number of causes threatening pollinator populations. We feel it's best to be cautious by keeping our use of pesticides to the absolute minimum and using them correctly.

If they ask, "Why do you use pesticides?" (if you do), you might say, "We believe that pesticides should be avoided, if possible, but sometimes they're necessary to prevent crop and plant loss from pests. We try to prevent pests by keeping our plants healthy, watering in the morning, pruning, maintaining diversity, and continually checking for pests and killing them by hand. When we have problems with pests, we try to use pesticides as alternatives whenever possible. When we use pesticides, we use them minimally and apply them correctly."

"How we want to address the pollinator decline, the best thing we can do is to create more habitat areas and increase their diversity by planting pollinator gardens. I can help you select the plants that will be the most helpful."

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Keep in touch!

Need some consumer-friendly info about what is a pollinator or how to plant a pollinator garden? Feel free to use any of the text on plantsomethingma.org. Just provide a link to our website, if you can.

Be sure to post photos of what you do on your social media, so we can follow you. If you have any tips to share with MFGA and MNLA members, please send them to us. And don't forget about the free resources we have for you on the website. To access these free members-only resources, visit plantsomethingma.org/membertod.s.

For questions or comments, email info@plantsomethingma.org.

Useful links:

- Member page to download Plant Something tools: plantsomethingma.org/membertools
- Plant Something MA pollinator pledge page: plantsomethingma.org/plant-something-for-pollinators/
- Million Pollinator Garden Signage: www.gardensinstitute.org/page/Pollinator-Garden-Challenge-Signage
- www.facebook.com/PlantSomethingMA
- www.twitter.com/PlantSomethingMA
- www.instagram.com/plantsomethingma



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10/4/2017

Take our Plant Something Quiz!

Take our Plant Something Quiz!

Take our quiz to find out if you are about to "Get the Dirt" for the first time, already "Play with Dirt" or are truly "Down with Dirt."

At the end of the quiz, you'll have the opportunity to enter a raffle to win a \$100 gift certificate for your local independent garden center or landscaper.

How would you categorize yourself as a gardener? (Select one.)

- ☒ New to Dirt (or a beginner)
- ☐ Play with Dirt (or an intermediate)
- ☐ Down with Dirt (or an expert)
- ☐ I don't consider myself a gardener
- ☐ I'm not sure how to categorize myself
- ☐ Other (Please comment):

How many years have you been planting? (Select one.)

- ☒ I have never planted anything before
- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ 1-2 years
- ☐ 2-5 years
- ☐ More than 5 years

2015 Planting Experience

In which of the following places did you plant in 2015? (Select all that apply.)

- ☐ Houseplants
- ☐ Hanging Baskets
- ☐ Containers on deck/patio/yard
- ☐ Raised beds
- ☐ In the ground
- ☐ Other/none of the above

How much space did you devote to planting in 2015? (Select one.)

- ☒ 1-100 square feet
- ☐ 200-500 square feet
- ☐ Over 500 square feet
- ☐ Other/none of the above (Please comment):

In which of the following activities did you engage during 2015? (Select all that apply.)

- ☐ I planted seedlings I bought from a store
- ☐ I planted seeds from packages I bought from a store

<https://plantsomethingma.wufoo.com/forms/take-our-plant-something-quiz/>

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- ☐ I planted seeds I ordered from a seed catalog
- ☐ I participated in seeds swaps
- ☐ I saved and planted seeds I'd harvested from my own plants
- ☐ I started seeds indoors under grow lights
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Other (please comment)

Which of the following plants did you grow or tend to in 2015? (Select all that apply.)

- ☐ Apple Tree
- ☐ Basil
- ☐ Beets
- ☐ Blueberry
- ☐ Dahlia
- ☐ Flowering shrubs
- ☐ Flowering trees
- ☐ Hosta
- ☐ Lily
- ☐ Marigold
- ☐ Pear Tree
- ☐ Peony
- ☐ Pepper
- ☐ Pumpkins
- ☐ Rose
- ☐ Salvia
- ☐ Shade trees
- ☐ Spinach
- ☐ Tomatoes
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Other (please comment)

Please indicate your experience with each of the following practices. (Select all that apply.)

	Heard of	Did in 2015 or previously
Composting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Succession planting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Companion planting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Extending the season	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Planting a pollinator garden	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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	Heard of	Did in 2015 or previously
Mulching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Grafting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Vertical gardening	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cold frame	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Spending Habits
Approximately how much did you spend on planting and maintaining your plants in 2015? (Select one.)

☒ Nothing
☐ \$1-\$99
☐ \$100 - \$199
☐ \$200-\$499
☐ \$500 or more
☐ Other:

From which of the following vendors did you purchase plants and plantings supplies in 2015? (Select all that apply.)

☐ Local greenhouse, nursery, or independent garden center
☐ Large box store garden shop (Wal-Mart, Home Depot, Lowe's, etc.)
☐ Internet
☐ Farmer's Market
☐ Other (please comment)

Please tell us about you.

Which category below includes your age? (Select one.)

☒ Under 18
☐ 18-34
☐ 35-50
☐ 51-70
☐ Over 70

In which Massachusetts county do you reside?

What type of home do you live in?

☒ House I own
☐ House I rent

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☐ Apartment I rent
☐ Condominium I own
☐ Condominium I rent
☐ Other

Please provide your email address. We'll score your answers and respond with your gardening level shortly. You'll be entered into a raffle to win a \$100 gift certificate to a local, independent garden center or landscaper. We promise not to flood you with email. And we'll never share, trade or sell your information!

Email

Type the characters from the image below. *

[Privacy & Terms](#)



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Organization:

Northeast Organic Farming Association

Project Title:

Organic Specialty Crops Cost of Production: Assessment & Education

Project Summary:

As the interest and supply of local produce steadily increases and competition for markets becomes more pronounced, New England's organic specialty crop growers need better tools and information to explore the financial impact of the various aspects of their operations. Farmers need relevant market information and financial analytical tools to be able to create crop plans to meet their financial goals, to inform the size and scope of their business models, and identify weaknesses and/or areas for improvements in their own operations. The crop-specific comparative enterprise analyses that this project produced gives farmers an opportunity to compare their metrics to those of other farms throughout New England, including such essential data as pricing, net and gross income, and overhead. Such an analysis was not previously available for regional organic vegetable crops.

The project's other primary intention was to teach area farmers how to track their own costs of production and analyze enterprise budgets. New England is home to many diversified vegetable and fruit growers, many of whom do not track crop-specific information. This lack of data makes it very challenging for them to determine the profitability of each crop or compare their data with other farms.

Project Approach:

In order to have a deeper understand of the range of costs of production, we coordinated with nine farms spread throughout the state that are indicative of the range of organic specialty crop growers in Massachusetts. These nine farms varied in acreage from three acres to about 20 acres, as well as business structure, years of experience, and crop diversity. Most of these growers had some experience with budgeting, but few had ever tracked any of their crops individually over an entire season.

Our technical assistant offered these nine growers direct assistance over the course of two growing seasons through farm visits, calls, and emails to break down the complex work of tracking all of the tasks necessary to accurately measure crop labor costs. Farmers were trained in the newly developed budget workbook created by our NOFA/VT partner, Richard Wiswall.

After the first season, participating farmers met with the technical advisor to help input and analyze their data and to assess whether there were any innovations that could serve them in lowering the costs of production for year two of the production. This workflow was followed throughout season two of the project.

The outcomes of the two-year crop-specific data was then compiled with the results from our partners in New Hampshire and Vermont and summarized in a series of fact sheets that farmers could use as a baseline for their operations.



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Throughout the project, our farmers and technical advisor were encouraged to seek out opportunities to share their experience at the many educational sessions and grower meetings throughout our state.

Goals and Outcomes Achieved:

Below is a summary of the goals and processes as they compare to the performance goals outlined in attachment B:

GOAL #1: *Support 32 specialty crops farmers (9 from Massachusetts, 9 from New Hampshire, and 14 from Vermont) in utilizing enterprise analysis to track and assess profitability of nine key specialty crops.*

Over the course of the winter of 2015, our team contracted with nine organic farmers throughout Massachusetts interested in performing crop-specific enterprise analyses. Each farm chose either two or three crops to focus on throughout the next two growing seasons. Our technical advisor, Derek Christianson, visited each farm to offer training and establish baselines using the workbook created by Richard Wiswall from NOFA-VT. Farmers were assisted over the course of the two growing seasons by regular phone calls and visits from our technical advisor and project coordinator.

We had anticipated that the analysis after the first growing season (2015) would inform the decisions in the second growing season (2016), which would result in a 5% increase in profit for the tracked specialty crops. Unfortunately, the 2016 growing season was a year of extreme drought conditions in Massachusetts and other parts of the northeast. Even though many of the participating farmers did implement innovative management strategies between year one and two, it was difficult or impossible to determine whether those innovations actually led to an increase in net profit for crops since the vast majority of growers had lower yield and net profits in 2016 than they did in 2015.

GOAL #2: *Work with specialty crops growers to develop fact sheets about production factors and market considerations affecting profitable production for nine specialty crops.*

After the two growing seasons of tracking crop data, we compiled data with our project partners in New Hampshire and Vermont to determine which crops have reliable data from which we can prepare comparative fact sheets. Because of the extreme drought conditions in the summer of 2016, several farms experienced total or near total losses of certain crops, this rendered their data unusable. After consulting with data specialists we determined that five crops warranted enough strong data for the creation of regional data sheets. Data from those five crops- potatoes, carrots, winter squash, onions, and lettuce- were compiled in comparisons of key metrics such as cases/acre, cultivation hours/acre, gross sales/acre, etc.

In addition to the 5 crop-specific fact sheets, we also worked with our project partners to create three other sheets: one that looked at comparisons of crop profitability across the five crops, one that looked at whole farm critical ratios, and a sheet on “tips for tracking costs of production” to help growers get started with their own crop-specific enterprise budgets.



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All fact sheets can be found here: <https://www.nofamass.org/nofa-cost-production-project>

GOAL #3: *Increase profitability of nine specialty crops among beginning and established farmers by sharing production strategies at 18 workshops, attended by at least 20 participants each.*

NOFA/Mass presented 6 workshops over the course of the grant cycle that either led growers through the process of crop-specific enterprise budgeting and analysis and/or presented key findings from our project. The majority of these workshops were taught by our technical advisor, Derek Christianson. Two of the six workshops were taught primarily by our grower-participants. One of the workshops was on-farm, while the rest were taught at conferences and winter grower meetings.

Here is a list of the six workshops:

- 1) “Making Major Money with Minor Crops: Producing Profit On The Edges” - 2016 NOFA/Mass Winter Conference, Derek Christianson
- 2) “Am I Making Money Growing Green Beans... Umm Maybe? Enterprise Analysis For Improved Decision Making on Small Scale Vegetable Farms” - SEMAP (Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership) Ag & Food Conference, February 28, 2016, Derek Christianson
- 3) “Am I Making Money Growing Green Beans... Umm Maybe? Enterprise Analysis For Improved Decision Making on Small Scale Vegetable Farms” - 2016 NOFA Summer Conference, Derek Christianson
- 4) “Is it Worth it to Grow Bok Choi?” - 2017 NOFA/Mass Winter Conference, Chris Kantlehner and Derek Christianson
- 5) “The Art, Science, & Craft of Profitable Onion Production” - 2017 NOFA Summer Conference, Derek
- 6) “The Integrated Farm” - Many Hands Organic Farm, September 10, 2017, Julie Rawson

Participation at these workshops ranged from a low end of 13 at the on-farm field day, to a high of 31 at the NOFA/Mass Winter Conference session. Although we offered surveys to all participants after the workshops completed, completion rate was below 50%. Many of the responses we did receive were promising. Several attendees at the 2016 NOFA Conference presentation noted afterward that they would be tracking the costs of their labor-intensive crops in the following season to reassess their pricing or whether the crop should be dropped altogether from their rotation.

GOAL #4: *Lessons learned at the organizational/administrative level of implementing this introductory benchmarking study will be shared with partnering organizations to assess the feasibility of a future regional and/or more comprehensive benchmarking project.*

After the two growing seasons of data tracking were complete, the project coordinator made contact with all of the Buy Local Associations as well as other grower groups throughout the



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state to inform them of the pending release of the fact sheets. Groups were given a synopsis of the project and were given the option to send data and fact sheets to their members.

Throughout the project, we made efforts to offer educational programming via our technical assistant at other grower meetings and conferences. The Southeast Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership was the only group that accepted our offer.

We have also had valuable conversations after the release of the fact sheets with the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) about the creation of a Northeast price reporting system for organic specialty crop growers. Using our baseline data, they are interested in creating a system for gathering more data on the prices farmers are being paid at various outlets- farmer's markets, wholesale, and restaurants- to share with their members. Such a system will allow growers to make informed decisions regarding the potential net profit of a new market for a given crop.

Beneficiaries:

This project primarily benefitted three groups:

- 1) Farm-participants: The greatest benefit was felt by those nine farmers who underwent an intensive study of their costs of production. Below is a sampling of the survey feedback from the participating farmers regarding lessons learned:
 - “Buying equipment for harvests can sometimes pay off quite fast”
 - “butternuts appeared much more profitable than I anticipated”
 - “I was surprised when calculating the marketing expenses how much that impacts the budget. Every wholesale route was more expense than I had previously acknowledged.”

In response to the question, “Did your experience in the cost of production study provide information or analysis that will impact your business or decision making? If so, how?” growers responded:

 - “Mostly, we will continue to track these crops, and other critical crops. We're not ready to drop anything after just one year of data, but we already plan to focus more on some crops, less on others. We will also look at ways to produce certain crops (like potatoes) more efficiently.”
 - “In the past I had one enterprise budget for the whole CSA, but now I will do more individual crop enterprises if I think that crop might be a loser.”
 - “Well, we'd already decided to not grow tomatoes commercially, but this made us feel better about it.”
- 2) The wider organic farm community- Although it is challenging to quantify how many farmers are now planning to track their costs of production as a direct result of this project, we have hosted roughly 120 farmers in our various educational events, and of those, many recognized that they may be losing money on certain crops without even knowing it. We have received over 500 hits on our website page related to this project as



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of this writing, as well as several emails of appreciation from local farmers for production of the fact sheets.

- 3) **Service Providers-** Prior to the conception of this grant, many service providers in our state had frequent conversation about the lack of enterprise budgeting education available to our state farmers, as well as baselines to measure profitability against other farms. Since the publication of our fact sheets, we have helped two Buy Local organizations coordinate workshops on enterprise budgeting.

Lessons Learned

Several best practices emerged from this project pertaining to farm enterprise research and, more generally, working with farmers on accurate data collection:

1. Find communication systems that work for farmers

The majority of our participants are diversified vegetable growers that are essentially unreachable by phone from May through September. We had assumed that there would be more space for occasional check-ins during that time, but some grower would only rarely, if ever, check their email during that time. Some also don't answer phone calls regularly. Only later in the project did we realize that some of our growers only use texting during the day. For future projects, it would be important to map out the flow of the season with each individual farmer and perhaps even plan phone calls well in advance. Short text reminders would also have been helpful to remind them of certain data requirements.

2. Frequent, short check-ins are essential

Organic vegetable farming is an incredibly demanding and complex task. During the peak busy seasons [usually corresponding to planting (May), weed season (June), and harvest (July-October)] many of the less essential tasks can get lost. We found by the second year of our project that frequent and short reminders about the importance of data collection helped keep this project on their daily workflow. A text message with a reminder and a tip of how to do so effectively is an invaluable tool to increase quality of data.

3. Expect surprises when working with growers

We experienced many surprises during the course of this project: one farm went out of business and, hence, dropped out; we experienced the worst drought in over 25 years, and so on. For that reason, it is essential to build redundancy into these projects: e.g. enlist more farmers than you think is necessary; extend the project for an extra year. This then allows for more accurate statistical analysis if the outliers can be thrown out. Luckily, we asked all growers to track at least two crops, and many decided to track three crops. This allowed us to be more particular about which crop data sets were most trustworthy.

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Organization:

Nuestras Raices, Inc.

Project Title:

The Holyoke Kindergarten Initiative: Specialty Crop Production Comes to the Classroom

Project Summary:

The Holyoke Kindergarten Initiative is a proven, popular in-classroom farm to school program that uses local food and farming to teach very young students and their families the basics of a healthy, local diet rich in specialty crop produce.

Holyoke has a high population of ultra-low-income Hispanic residents and as is too often the case, urban Latino poverty is accompanied by an epidemic of obesity, diabetes and heart disease. Specialty crops are excellent weapons in this public health battle, particularly those which are culturally favored in Holyoke kitchens, and which are grown here in the Nuestras Raices gardens and farm plots. Students will learn to enjoy specialty crops that are popular and important to their culture, and bring these lessons home to their parents and caregivers.

The Holyoke Kindergarten Initiative has been partially supported the past two years through the SPBGP. The Holyoke Public Schools (HPS) piloted the Kindergarten Initiative in three Holyoke elementary schools (reaching 10 Kindergarten classes). After two years of building trust, HPS asked that the Initiative expand from its current three schools to district-wide implementation for the 2014-2015 school year. This decision doubled the reach of the program, from 250 impacted students and their families to 500 impacted students and their families (a total of six schools, twenty Kindergarten classrooms), demonstrating the District's commitment to the benefits of fresh, healthy specialty crops.

The Holyoke Kindergarten Initiative is important and timely because it is the only farm to school program running in the city, and the Superintendent approved its expansion district-wide. Building upon the HPS' commitment to local food and farming, in 2014-2015 we can deepen the program's impact by featuring culturally-preferred specialty crops. The United States is rapidly diversifying, and local food systems need access to the specialty crops favored by residents from many cultural backgrounds. Further, the public health impact from overeating and poor nutrition threatens families, and fresh and healthy specialty crops are an excellent and tasty way to feed all people the fresh produce they culturally prefer.

Project Approach:

The Kindergarten Initiative in Holyoke included district-wide use of the curriculum funded by an earlier SCBGP award. This curriculum is now embedded in the Holyoke Kindergarten lesson plans, but schools can only offer farm field trips, extra lessons and cooking events if funding permits. While the initial approach taken by this project varied from the original work plan, as grant funds arrived late in the school year, this award made it possible for a significant increase in numbers of Kindergarten students to attend a variety of field trips over previous KI years.



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The Kindergarten Initiative is a successful program because adults are offered the opportunity to learn alongside the young kindergarteners without feeling ignorant or inadequate for their inexperience regarding where food comes from and how specialty crops are grown. As an additional benefit, the deep engagement demonstrated by Holyoke parents equips them to model and reinforce patterns of better nutrition and healthier eating for life.

The revised scope of work turned its attention to community outreach and education. Over the course of the next 15 months, hundreds of community individuals, including high school and college students and adults were taught how to select and prepare cultural produce in healthful ways. Many of these individuals also received information on and-or practice in cultivating this same food. Hundreds more resident enjoyed food tastings and watched cooking demonstrations at farmer's markets. And shoppers in inner-city neighborhoods were able to purchase cultural produce brought directly to them.

Lastly, creating the film that tells the story of Latino cultural crops in Holyoke was a favorable development of the revised scope of work plan. It involved Nuestras Raices farmers, Board of Director members and others in a new type of historical and cultural outreach.

From the positive feedback received, we concluded that community members enjoyed and valued the increased access to specialty crops and that they will consume an increased volume of produce in proportion to its availability.

All project partners took an active role in the project, particularly with recruitment for the Spanish-language cooking demonstrations.

Goals and Outcomes Achieved:

The outcomes for this grant are reported in two sections, reflecting the initial period once the grant funds were released and the second work period considering the revised scope of work.

The initial working period was April – June 2015 in the school system:

The KI approach was to combine on-farm experience via field trips with classroom teaching events. From late April 2015 through June 2015, twenty Kindergarten classes enjoyed field trips to an apple orchard, to the North Hadley, MA Sugar Shack/Boisvert Farm and to Nuestras Raices' own specialty crop farm in Holyoke.

Holyoke parents demonstrated extremely strong parental engagement in the field trips with 60 parents participating. By sharing the learning experience with their children, adults from 60 different Holyoke households were included in farm-based education about healthy specialty crops, and were informed about local farmers markets and where to buy farm fresh produce in Holyoke. As previously noted, this engagement puts parents in a pivotal role to help students retain what they learned as well as empowering nutritional changes in Holyoke households.

Within the classroom setting, the EMO goal was for kindergarteners to reliably identify sometimes/any time foods, identify fruits and vegetables, and to understand that local farm food is grown close to home. Within the limited timeframe of our grant work plan period (about 6 weeks) we made reasonable progress informing students about these concepts.



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During classroom events when we talked about “sometimes” and “any time” foods the students caught on quickly that fresh specialty crops are “any time” foods (using strawberries as an example) and that other foods that seem like they are made from fruits and vegetables are “sometimes” foods that are really candy in disguise. We assess that 80-85% of students understood the concept of sometimes/any time foods from this presentation.

Kindergarteners initially had trouble understanding the concept of local food, but when we started to talk about food grown close to home – near where you live – the idea began to stick. We assess that about 65-70% of students understood this idea. Because the KI did not run all school year as planned, the message was not repeated and reinforced multiple times. However, these data demonstrate a favorable trend in increased ability to identify “sometimes” and “any time” foods over the 15-20% improvement demonstrated in 2012-2013 Initiative results.

Another work plan task that did not occur exactly as planned was the pre-and-post program evaluation using the assessment instruments that were developed for the Worcester Kindergarten Initiative in concert with the MA Farm to School Project by Fertile Ground Schools. We did our best to assess the learning milestones of the children and their parents during our classroom sessions and on the field trips, but we don’t have before and after results.

The Kindergarten Initiative’s goal was to reach 500 students. It reached some 440 actual students.

Revised scope work period: January 2016 through September 29, 2016

The original project work plan also included family cooking events which we were unable to host because we only had a few weeks to work during the 2014-2015 school year on the Kindergarten Initiative. However, as approved and as amended in a 2/29/16 change of scope document, we held not three, but nearly 20 cooking events and almost 150 individual sessions to present information on healthy foods, thus educating students more effectively through ongoing engagement instead of one-time events.

Under the Expected Measurable Outcome for raising awareness of how to select/buy and cook specialty foods, as well as how to choose healthy foods, activities included:

1. As of Fall 2015, a new partnership was launched with Paulo Freire Social Justice Charter School (PFSJCS) to teach students about food and food systems. The “Food Justice/Cooking” class curriculum taught students to critically evaluate the health context of their food, and to consider food origins as well as how to prepare food. Students learned hands-on lessons about cooking specialty crops as well as gardening. This twice-weekly class was introduced in Spring 2016 to 14 students; in Fall 2016, two sessions were taught, enrolling 28 students.
2. Nuestras Raices taught nutritious eating for 6 weeks in partnership with Holyoke Community College’s Nutrition and Culinary Department for 13 unduplicated individuals, with 7 people graduating from the series. Putting a healthy twist on traditional Caribbean dishes was emphasized.



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3. Nuestras Raices' *Siembra Siempre* (Always Growing) summer internship program taught 20 high school students to how to plant, cook and eat healthy food. Students maintained community gardens across the city and worked on-farm for six weeks. They had a practical lesson in the kitchen learning how to cook *sofrito*.
4. Twenty individuals convened for a canning class to learn how to preserve cultural crops for the Massachusetts winter, beginning with canning tomatoes and peppers.
5. At an October 2016 Fall Festival, 55 parents and students at Lawrence School in Holyoke gathered to carve pumpkins and to taste pumpkins and *calabash* squash. They received instruction for cooking *calabash*, as well.
6. At weekly Farmers' Markets, Nuestras has focused on healthy food and healthy eating: in addition to selling farm fresh produce and cultural specialty crops, a major cooking demonstration and food sampling event was held in conjunction with Taste of South Holyoke Day. One hundred thirty-five parent and children learned how to incorporate more fruits and vegetable in to their diets through a smoothie sampling, accenting the importance of healthy eating.

Additional promotions included Nuestras Raices serving as the 2016 operational partner for the GoFresh! Mobile Market of Springfield, bringing fresh produce into the neighborhoods of Springfield, MA and Holyoke each week. Via the Mobile Market, Holyoke shoppers were able to purchase cultural crops such as *aji dulce* peppers, *gandules* (pigeon peas) and cilantro directly in their neighborhoods. In the first six weeks of the market, more than 132 discrete transactions were made, totaling some \$5500.

Nuestras Raices also began a live radio broadcast, presenting weekly in Spanish about healthy eating and urban farming. It is estimated that the show reaches some 2500 listeners.

Finally, a <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iH08GvWPSGM> Spanish-language video was produced in the Fall of 2016. It featured Nuestras Raices farmers and gardeners who are primarily of Puerto Rican descent talking about their experience growing cultural crops in Massachusetts. They also offered horticultural practices that help extend the season as much as possible. The video was produced by a staff member of the Holyoke Boys and Girls Club, which houses a film production facility, along with youth volunteers. It was posted on YouTube in December 2016, this video increases awareness for younger Latinos who are not familiar with traditional foods such as *aji dulce*, *gandules* and *calabaza* winter squash. It therefore ties generations together in a celebration of heritage foods.

These activities have reached in excess of 500 individuals, versus 300 predicted.

One of the most successful - although unplanned - outcomes of this project is having completed the Spanish-language film. The film outlives the term of this project and creates a tool that can be over and over to educate and inform Latino friends and neighbors, as well as introduce the larger community to Nuestras Raices' work with and support of Latino specialty crops in the



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Northeast. The film also supports most of the accepted project Expected Measurable Outcomes (all goals besides those tied directly to educating kindergartners are furthered through the film.)

Beneficiaries:

Demographic groups who benefitted from specialty crop education, cultivation, preparation and consumption included:

- Initially, 500 Kindergarten families in Holyoke, totaling at least 2,000 individuals, plus 20 teachers, 20 aides, 10 school administrators and principals.
- The Kindergarten Initiative local farms, who benefitted handsomely from farm field trips and periodic purchases of local foods for classroom tastes and snacks. The average farm field trip brings \$1,500 for 3 schools to a farm's revenue stream.

The revised scope of work to promote the benefits of locally grown Latino specialty crops includes the following groups:

- Nuestras Raices specialty crop farmers
- Paulo Freire Social Justice Charter High School families (approx 450 families)
- Nuestras Raices membership (600 families)
- *Siembra Siempre* summer youth farm workers (20 youth)
- Holyoke Boys and Girls Club for film production (20 youth)
- Low-income, low-access Latino City residents at 5 housing properties across Holyoke (some 250+ residents)

All project partners took an active role in the project, particularly with recruitment for our Spanish language cooking events.

Lessons Learned

The Initiative began to link culturally-relevant specialty crops to the schools, which opens the door for school cafeterias that purchase locally-grown produce to incorporate new specialty crops into their school menus. This is an unexplored new marketing channel for specialty crops that will be of particular interest to the school food operations in other Massachusetts gateway communities.

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Organization:

The Sustainable Business Network of Massachusetts

Project Title:

Specialty Crop Trade Show, 2015: An Effective Model for Increasing the Sale and Purchase of Local Specialty Crops

Project Summary:

There is a growing demand for specialty crops across the state of Massachusetts and yet there are many barriers that inhibit the increase in specialty crop sales. Barriers vary for buyers and sellers of specialty crops, but the top issues are related to distribution, affordability and availability. These barriers are inhibiting the expansion and integration of specialty crop sales across New England. We believe that by fostering dialogue between the local specialty crop growers and buyers, many of these barriers can be overcome, facilitating the establishment of new business partnerships and increasing the sales of specialty crop products in New England. By hosting a Specialty Crop Trade Show, the Sustainable Business Network of Massachusetts was giving specialty crop growers and buyers the space and opportunity to address these barriers and facilitate deeper connections, creating greater economic impact for specialty crop producers in New England.

Project Approach:

- The purpose of this project was to host a Specialty Crop Trade show that would provide a dynamic and effective platform that brings together local specialty growers and wholesale buyers, facilitating business exchange through open floor trading and networking throughout the day. The event aimed to address and overcome barriers to specialty crop grower and buyer collaboration including distribution, availability, and pricing to establish new business partnerships between local specialty crop growers and buyers and increase the sales of specialty crop products in New England.
- SBN also hosted a Local Food Trade show at an adjacent exhibition hall. By inviting non-specialty crop producers, the event attracted a greater number of interested buyers and therefore also benefited specialty crop growers/producers. To ensure that grant funds were solely used for the Specialty Crop Trade show and not utilized to benefit other represented commodities including dairy, meat and other non-specialty crop products the following steps were taken-
 - We had different pricing categories (Specialty Crop vendors & Non specialty crop vendors) on the Trade show registration. \$100 participation fee was instituted for non-specialty crop exhibitors while specialty crop producers were able to exhibit for free. The Buyers were charged \$25 participation fee. The registrations & fees were tracked in separate documents for the Specialty crop vendors and the Non Specialty crop vendors. All the expenses were tracked separately, ensuring the funds allotted to the Specialty Crop vendors were not used for the other vendors.
 - All program income from the Specialty Crop Trade Show, 2015 was used to fund staff hours to develop additional resources to foster new grower-buyer relationships and increased specialty crop integration. SBN developed a free and accessible New



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England Specialty Crop Wholesale Buying Guide, which was posted on SBN's websites for use by restaurants and other food-based institutions.

- SBN worked closely with project partners including 'Buy Local' groups from around the state, including the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR), Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership (SEMAP), Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA), Central Mass Grown, and others, as well as the Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance (NAMA), Health Care Without Harm, Farm to Institution New England (FINE), Food Solutions New England (FSNE) and The New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. Partner organizations supported the project by promoting the event to their networks, and supporting SBN in shaping the event seminars and finding knowledgeable facilitators and panelists.
- The Specialty Crop Trade Show included two workshops sessions, addressing best practices and innovative ways of trading between local producers and buyers. Based on the feedback SBN received in the 2014 Trade show surveys, the workshops were developed to maximize the relevant information, recommendations, and resources for both producers and buyers.

Summary of Activities:

Specialty Crop producers and buyers were recruited from Massachusetts and New England to participate in this event. Specialty crop producers were recruited and engaged beyond this event in a number of ways, including:

- Email invitation through event lists, including our previous Local Food Trade Show and Seminar in 2010, 2013 and 2014, as well as our specialty crop producer outreach list used for SBN's Boston Local Food Festival.
- Email invitations and newsletter eblasts through Buy Local networks and other partner networks, totaling more than a few thousand e-mail contacts.
- Attending the Winter NOFA Conference in Worcester, MA and the MA Farm to Cafeteria conference to network with over 40 Massachusetts Specialty Crops vendors and over 1,000 conference attendees.
- Promotion of all of the Trade Show buyers and producers on the website throughout the year to encourage additional business connections beyond the event itself.
- Listings in our Wholesale Local Buying Guide - Specialty Crop producers with an interest in selling wholesale are added to the Local Food Wholesale Buying Guide, which we host on our website and distribute directly via e-mail to interested vendors for our festival and other events to encourage the use of Massachusetts-based specialty crops.

The pre-event survey results were shared with event partners; we emailed an updated buyer/producer directory to partners and all event participants. We added specialty crop producers to the 2015 Wholesale Local Buying Guide, a resource that is shared with vendors for all SBN events. A post-event exit survey & follow up survey were conducted as well to better understand the outcome of the Trade show and help us plan the better. Survey results are outlined below within Outcomes Achieved.

The 2015 Specialty Crop Trade show offered educational workshops addressing common issues for the specialty crop growers and buyers. After much consideration and discussions with our partner organizations, we decided to focus on educational workshops focusing on producer and



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buyer issues, instead of the Open Space Technology session we had initially proposed. Based on last year's feedback, we offered two sessions- The morning session was geared towards the buyers and the afternoon session was geared towards the producers, each session consisted of three workshops. Each workshop featured an experienced and knowledgeable facilitator and a panel of experts for in-depth topical discussions offering insight and tools on relevant topics and the interactive format encouraged questions and answers between participants and the panelists. The workshop topics included: Establishing Specialty Crop Trade Relationships, Accessing Markets, Distribution Models, Pricing, Packaging, Food Labels, Marketing Tools for Reaching Potential Customers, Identifying Prospects and Closing the Sale and The New England Food Vision.

Goals and Outcomes Achieved:

Our goal was to engage a minimum of 37 Specialty Crop Growers/Producers from across Massachusetts and New England and a minimum of 85 wholesale Specialty Crop Buyers including restaurants, retailers, producers, institutions, and non-profits.

The 2015 Specialty Crop Trade show included 27 Specialty Crop producers. The decrease in the number of producers was due to the unusually harsh 2015 New England winter. Unfortunately the 2015 New England winter was the snowiest and coldest winter on record. Many of the Specialty Crop producers who registered could not attend as they had to deal with delayed farming schedules, road hazards, power outages and weather related issues.

The event attracted 123 buyers from over 100 organizations. Many buyer organizations sent more than one representative and we also invited farmers market managers to attend for free. From 2014 to 2015, the Local Specialty Crop Trade Show experienced a 16.25% growth in the number of buyer organizations with an interest in specialty crops or products made using specialty crops.

A buyer/producer directory listing specialty crop products offered and sought was shared with all participants and also with the producers and buyers who could not attend due to the weather. A full list of producers and buyers was also available on our website.

One of the objectives for this Trade Show was for 50% of participating specialty crop producers and buyers will make at least 4 new business leads.

The post-event exit survey result showed that 85.7% of the Specialty Crop producers thought that participating in the Trade show was beneficial to them. 54% of the specialty crop producers interacted with an average of 15 buyers, a majority of them being retail grocers, hospitals, distributors and food processors. We followed up again with all event participants six months after the Trade Show via e-mail and phone. Out of the specialty crop producers that participated in the Trade Show, 71% indicated that they had made at least one new business partnership. On average, specialty crop producers were able to establish 1.5 new business partnerships as a result of the Local Food Trade Show.

Specialty Crop buyers on the other hand interacted with 15 different producers on average as well. In our exit survey right after the event, 25% of buyers indicated they had established at least one new business partnership already. On average, buyers indicated that they were



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interested in following up with close to 40% of all vendors they had connected with. When we followed up 6 months after the event 50% of buyer respondents said they had formed business partnerships as a result of the event. On average, buyers established 1 new business partnership as a result of the Trade Show.

Despite not reaching our entire anticipated goals, 85.7% of specialty crop producers said the event was beneficial to their business, and 91.6% said they would most likely participate in another Local Food Trade Show. 87.5% of buyers experienced the event as beneficial for their business and 85% said they want to participate again in future Local Food Trade Shows.

One of our greatest challenges has been collecting quantitative data to illustrate the growth in specialty crop sales. In 2015, we conducted three different comprehensive surveys-

- A pre-event intake survey coupled to the event registration, gathering information about the farms, businesses and organizations participating, including products buyers are seeking, etc. This year we worked closely with Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA) to institute a more comprehensive pre-event survey to get a better understanding of the production capacity of the specialty crop producers.
- An exit survey distributed and collected at the event, collecting information about the number of potential business partners met, and general satisfaction with the event and workshops.

Finally, a post event survey conducted six months after the event to determine the number of actual business partnerships formed as a result of the event.

The pre-event intake survey was mandatory to register and therefore had a 100% response rate. It revealed that the largest buyer groups attending were Food Startups/Processors/Others (32%), Retailers (16%), and Institutions/Hospitals (14%) – thanks to our strong partnership with Healthcare without Harm, and Non Profits (14%). The product type most buyers were interested in were fresh fruits and vegetables followed by value added products made with more than 50% specialty crops. Interestingly, buyers identified Availability/connections as by far the most pressing barrier in sourcing more local food (87%), illustrating the need for projects like the Local Food Trade Show. Distribution/delivery/logistics came in second (56%) and Affordability/price came third (50%). Specialty crop growers and producers identified finding buyers/making connections as the main barrier (50%) and distribution/delivery/logistics was the second important barrier in selling more products wholesale (38%), and pricing/capital coming in third (21%). The difficulty of buyers finding local suppliers points to an increased interest in local specialty crops among wholesale buyers. SBN will hence aim in engaging more specialty crop growers and producers prepared to sell wholesale in future Trade Shows to address this demand.

The exit survey yielded a response rate of 83% among producers and 23% among buyers. Results are discussed above, in the Outcomes and Goals Achieved section.

The post event survey proved to be more challenging. It was difficult to get responses, both by phone and email. Despite many attempts to contact the buyers and producers, the response rates



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were lower (22% for buyers, and 40% for specialty crop producers). Many of the participants contacted indicated that they did not have a full recollection as considerable time had passed since the event. Hence the results of this survey are less robust. Some participants also mentioned that the amount of surveys conducted was a little burdensome. To get a better response, SBN plans to conduct the follow up survey for future Trade Shows sooner.

Beneficiaries:

The beneficiaries of this event included New England based specialty crop producers, potential specialty crop wholesale buyers and statewide 'buy local' groups and our event partners. Our hope is that consumers also benefited from this event through increased access to healthy local food in their local retail grocers, restaurants, cafeterias, etc. Also, the number of visitors with an interest in our local food system to our website, as well as of participants in our other SBN local food events that are more consumer oriented, is constantly growing.

Through the Specialty Crop Trade Show, specialty crop producers are gaining increased exposure for their products and services, which may lead to increased sales across the state. They also benefit by developing a broader network of fellow specialty crop growers to learn from, as well as a group of potential buyers that they have more personal connections with, making it easier to develop long term business relationships. Also, by understanding the needs of buyers seeking local specialty crops in greater detail, producers can be better prepared for crop planning. Moreover, promotion of all of the Trade Show buyers and producers on the website throughout the year encourages additional business connections beyond the event itself.

Buyers benefit from participation in our event by gaining a better understanding of specialty crops and specialty crop products available within the region along with developing strategies for purchasing specialty crops retail or wholesale. They also benefit from a broader network between other buyers, creating a more coherent learning action network to create efficiencies for purchasing more specialty crops. This event also helps them to meet the growing demand for specialty crops in the marketplace.

As a local business network, SBN has a history of establishing business-to-business relationships and partnerships and of helping both food service businesses integrate local specialty crop products into their menus and helping farmers/producers outreach to food service vendors. The trade show helped SBN in facilitating deeper connections and creating greater economic impact for specialty food growers/producers in New England.

Our partners benefit by increasing exposure to markets for their members or networks of specialty crop producers and buyers. By supporting events like this, they are strengthening the brand of 'buying local' for consumers of all levels, from individual consumers, to larger institutional marketplaces. They also gain exposure via our event outreach, website, promotional materials, a vendor space at the event to network, as well as access to data generated by the event related to specialty crop sales and best practices.

Lessons Learned

The goal for the SBN Specialty Crop Trade Show is to offer invaluable time savings and convenient opportunities for specialty crop growers to network and establish business leads, which may develop into business transactions and partnerships in the future, and for buyers to



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gain contacts and future opportunities to source local specialty crop and products. By hosting the Specialty Crop Trade Show and through our surveys, we have been able to reinforce our understanding for the importance of this event to specialty crop producers and buyers.

Specialty crop vendors identified networking with buyers and fellow producers as the most valuable aspect of the event. Tabling was ranked second, followed by workshops. The feedback we received after the Trade show made it clear that the producers and the buyers would like more time to network. We have considered the possibility of increasing the Trade show duration for next year.

The workshops were popular and well attended. The workshop topics were thoroughly researched and planned with the help of our partners. They included a panel of experts and facilitators, providing an opportunity for the attendees to learn and explore. One feedback we received about the workshop was the lack of time between the two workshop sessions. Attendees would prefer just one session of workshops, as that will give the workshop attendees more time to network.

The specialty crop producers and buyers have also expressed an interest in having consulting sessions with experts. We are considering adding a consulting session in the afternoon for the specialty crop producers and buyers to have a one-on-one session with industry experts in areas like marketing, sales, finance and more.

The Trade show attracted specialty crop growers and producers that were both well prepared to develop wholesale business relationships, as well as some growers that were learning more about how to build capacity to get to that level within their business but we would like to engage a larger number of Specialty Crop producers and buyers in the future. SBN aims to increase our outreach to connect with Specialty Crop growers and buyers from all across New England. We also plan to open the registrations for the Trade Show earlier so that producers can plan their schedule accordingly.

Another area we would like to focus and improve upon is the actual business partnerships that are formed with the Specialty Crop grower and buyers. In 2016, SBN proposes to host a post trade show matchmaking event for the local specialty crop producers and local buyers. Similar to the trade show, our intention is to provide opportunities for one-on-one interactions where availability, pricing, and distribution options can be discussed, making it easier for buyers and sellers to do business in a smaller setting, with an intent of forming new business relationships.

The Specialty crop producers have a strong interest in being listed in our Wholesale Local Buying Guide in order to continue the exposure to their business for wholesale and retail buyers. SBN has had hundreds of restaurant and prepared food vendors access this list since March of 2015, with new producers being listed in the guide yearly. This guide, together with the event participant directory, partner outreach, email and phone follow up, and our event website, was effective in supporting event participants before and after the Trade Show. It is our hope that this resulted in a positive gain towards increased specialty crop sales and reduced some of the barriers in Massachusetts.



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During recent years, the growing interest of Massachusetts consumers in “buying local” reflects their desire to eat more nutritious food, support the local economy, and sustain the environment. In 2012 the number of farms and food businesses in Massachusetts topped 12,000, and Massachusetts rank sixth in the U.S. for the total number of “community supported agriculture,” or CSA, farms. In Massachusetts, there are now more than 2,200 farms (13%) that sell directly to consumers at farm stands, farmers markets, and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms as compared to the national average of only 2.3%. This growth in Massachusetts shows the effectiveness and success of the Buy Local groups in the state. Increasing direct sales can benefit farmers, as it allows them to receive a greater share of consumers’ dollars by reducing many non-production costs. The aim for the Specialty Crop Trade show was to form new business relationships between specialty crop producers and buyers, as well as address and try to overcome persisting barriers to the specialty crop trade. The Local Specialty Crop Trade Show, 2015, resulted in a positive gain towards increased specialty crop sales and decreased barriers in the New England region and was received extremely well among both producers and buyers, which reaffirmed the need for its existence.

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Organization:

World Farmers, Inc.

Project Title:

Building Capacity of Immigrant and Refugee Farmers to Produce

Project Summary:

This grant allowed World Farmers to build capacity of immigrant and refugee farmers to grow and market ethnic specialty crops in Massachusetts. This project addressed two of many barriers faced by farmers at Flats Mentor Farm in Lancaster, MA: 1) Address and achieve food safety training and education requested and/or required by certain markets; 2) Increase knowledge and understanding of market requirements and industry standards for post-harvest handling.

Assistance of various types was offered directly to the immigrant and refugee farmers who grow numerous specialty crops at Flats Mentor Farm, and sell to markets throughout Massachusetts. Our target audience lacks the knowledge and business experience in this country to fully see and execute the relationship between sustainable crop production and market needs, this project and its activities helped to level the playing field for the farmers at Flats Mentor Farm. Secondary goals achieved that were equally important to World Farmers as our primary goals were to: Improve the income of immigrants and refugees; Provide culturally appropriate fresh local food for communities in Massachusetts; and Enable farmers to market their ethnic specialty crops from their own countries.

Project Approach:

World Farmers' SCBG project *Building Capacity of Immigrant and Refugee Farmers to Produce Ethnic Specialty Crops* allowed for many much needed support to the farmers at Flats Mentor Farm in Lancaster, MA. After performing a needs assessment with our commercial farmers it was clear that one-on-one assistance and hands-on or visual trainings were key to implementing individualized food safety practices at the Farm.

Key achievements of the project:

- Developed useful tools for post-harvest food safety training and learning through pictorial guides and videos;
- Worked individually with farmers to review food safety guidelines and build understanding and rationale for following through on the guidelines as product goes to market;
- Researched and explored best production techniques for three ethnic specialty crops in particular, interactively between staff and farmers at Flats Mentor Farm. Results were shared with all Flats Mentor farmers interested in exploring production and sales of those crops, results will continue to be shared; and
- Collaborated with MDAR to assess and implement changes for Commonwealth Quality certification.

Our more general achievement and goal was to ensure nonnative-English speaking farmers at Flats Mentor Farm have equal opportunity to learn about, understand, implement, and benefit from updated food safe production and handling practices. Incorporating these processes with



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immigrant and refugee populations into everyday schedules requires a greater amount of time and technical assistance, as tracking and keeping written records is not necessarily a cultural norm, particularly for those who can't even write in their native tongue.

World Farmers original project proposal listed three specialty ethnic crops to focus on: Lalu, Spider plant, and Taro. Of these three, two remained in our focus for the grant (although one was referenced by a different name, without notice/warning of that in the final grant), and one was substituted for a more commonly grown crop among the communities at Flats Mentor Farm. Lalu remained the same, as initial identification and preliminary market research was proven accurate. Preliminary market research on Spider plant was proven correct, however the name by which it would be most marketable was not Spider Plant. Although known among researchers and English speakers as Spider plant, the crop is known better as Chinsaga among Kenyan communities – and these are the communities whom we were working with to conduct needed research and training on food safety market needs. Unfortunately our initial assessment for the crop Taro was not as accurate as the other two, for several reasons. Taro was identified within Hmong communities as a crop these farmers planned to increase production and sales for. In the time between writing the grant and beginning our efforts, the customer base at farmers' markets with our Hmong farmers drastically shifted. By the middle of the 2014 summer market season, The Vietnamese customer base in Worcester, which had for many years been the core customer base for our Hmong farmers, stopped coming to our farmers' markets. Even to date these customers' absence is felt by our farmers, who have been struggling to rebuild a new reliable customer base, largely with other Asian communities. At the same time, the farming populations at Flats Mentor Farm began to shift. Once primarily Hmong farmers growing Asian crops, by 2014 the African farming populations at Flats Mentor Farm exploded and grew well beyond that of the Hmong or Asian farmers. Given these combined shifts, we shifted from focusing on Taro, to encouraging and supporting African White Corn (Maize) production and marketing.

Goals and Outcomes Achieved:

Alongside many other **Short-Term Outcomes** within this project you can find a sampling of some activities below:

Work Plan Project Activity	Summary of Tasks Accomplished
Coordinate grant activities	- World Farmers staff coordinated all grant activities and took care of all reporting needs, with the support of MDAR staff.
Planning period for outreach activities	- Taken accordingly.
Reach out and Coordinate with the Massachusetts Department of Agriculture Resources to assist in the development of Food	- On-farm evaluation conducted by Michael Botelho (MDAR) to prepare farmers for food safety certification. - Implemented recommendations to comply with Commonwealth Quality certification standards. - Organized food safety training program for farmers on



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Safety program for the FMF.	<p>proper hygiene and food handling.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Held several meetings with farmers to coordinate safe food handling practices.
Connect with and identify all farmers who are marketing produce and are required to have the certification training.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The 2015 growing season concluded in mid-October. With the end of the season WF staff began conducting one-on-one farmer assessments with commercial farmers to address the need for food safety certification for wholesale distribution. - Conducted individual farmer assessments with commercial farmers to address food safety needs.
Develop the process for the creation of the pictorial food safety protocol and post-harvest handling manuals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developed a food safety training video to teach farmers the basic principles of harvesting, handling, and storing vegetables properly. - Scheduled and coordinated time with translators and developed training videos in other languages. - Executed trainings with pictorial food safety guides to meet the needs of our non-English and limited-English speaking farmers. - The training video will allow our non-English speaking farmers the independence to make informed decisions on how manage their farming business. - A preliminary plan for composting system at the Farm was developed. - Farmers were given the option and opportunity to test their soil at the beginning of the year, and offered assistance on reading the results and assessing soil needs. - Tracking system was created to manage traceability for wholesale distribution of the produce at Flats Mentor Farm, crucial to ensuring the quality, safety, and transparency of our farming practices.
Coordinate logistics such as transportation, interpreters and refreshments for the hands-on farmer trainings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordinated on as-needed basis. - Coordinated with translators for food safety meetings of varied intensity and content.
Develop pictorial simple food safety guides	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - See above activity.
Prepare and conduct food safety workshop trainings and develop follow-up mentoring sessions for all farmers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Held a workshop to train basic food safety for farmers, building off MDAR certification materials. - Coordinated all-farm pickup for the end of the season, to remove trash and debris from their plots to prepare the land for the next growing season - World Farmers staff held a post season workshop for all Phase I farmers to discuss growing practices, farm safety,



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	<p>and goals for the next growing season.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Staff met individually with farmers to ensure food safety protocols were being implemented for all produce sold through wholesale and farmers' markets.
Conduct research on post-harvest handling of 3 identified crops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Best practices post-harvest guides were developed. Research for the Chinsaga and Lalu guides was performed under this grant. - Staff completed taping of the post-harvest handling video for the crop Lalu, Chinsaga video is in post-production and editing. These videos are instrumental in providing a visual aide for our farmers on food handling for these specialty crops and beneficial to those farmers interested in exploring new crops to produce and market. - Research was done at the end of 2014 season, throughout the 2015 season, and through part of the 2016 season. Although not a research institution, the wisdom and observations of our farmers guided our information collection in 2014 and 2016, and we hired the help of a Production Manager to research Lalu in 2015.
Assess the adoption capacity of farmers to mentor other refugee farmers on the Food Safety practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accompanied by some of our commercial farmers, World Farmers attended the Northeast Organic Farmers Association (NOFA) Massachusetts seminar on No Till Farming Practices for Soil Rejuvenation. The seminar featured techniques for building soil fertility, seeding appropriately, and sustainable no-till farming for commercial use. The workshop included a tour of Heifer Farm in Rutland, MA. Not only were the farmers excited about implementing what they had learned but they were also eager to share with other farmers and family members unable to attend.
After each workshop, check in with farmers to ensure understanding of new concepts and facilitate farmers' adoption of new methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Done on individual basis, usually casual in form but very reflective. All Feedback is tracked and assessed in the winter in preparations for the coming year. - World Farmers' Production Manager conducted a specialty crop evaluation survey with farmers to discuss vegetable quality, pest management issues, and one-on-one soil enrichment instruction.
Research and Develop post-harvest guides for the 3 crops mentioned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A crop evaluation was conducted to determine the viability of crops being grown at Flats Mentor Farm. World Farmers staff worked closely with farmers to create individualized plans to ensure the health and marketability of the produce. - Best practices post-harvest guides were developed. Research for the Chinsaga and Lalu guides was performed under this grant.



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	- World Farmers identified a reliable commercial seed source for Lalu. Our farmers successfully planted, applied sustainable growing techniques, and harvested Lalu for wholesale distribution.
Evaluate which trainings need to be repeated in coming year to increase mentor farmers and refugee farmers' growing capacity for next season	- Evaluation of training needs occurred over winter season(s). It was confirmed that harvest and post-harvest trainings were needed for commercial farmers looking to produce and sell these identified specialty crops. Also confirmed were needs for review of post-harvest handling practices.
Evaluate the factors necessary to enhance the quality of three crops for the African markets in the northeastern U.S	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Linked farmers to markets interested in specialty crops. Worked with farmers to forecast growth of specialty crops into new and existing markets. - World Farmers worked closely with Ethnic Grocers in Brockton and Roxbury to introduce freshly harvested Lalu for those markets. Market assessments showed that Lalu has only been available frozen through ethnic grocers in the northeast.
Conduct interpretation throughout all of project activities	- Coordinated on as-needed basis.
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Production Research Evaluation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lalu: Performed by WF Production Manager with crop trials for various pest management techniques. • Corn: Performed by all farmers who received white corn seed from WF, staff and farmers assessed production techniques, and supported seed-saving efforts. - Market Research Evaluation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lalu: Performed by WF staff, 2 residential communities in Boston identified as successful and 3 wholesale buyers. All successful. • Corn: Ongoing, identified and pursued individually by FMF farmers. • Chinsaga: Although very popular in the Kenyan community, we found much less market demand than originally expected. - Training and TA Evaluation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All trainings and TA was hands-on, visual and/or discussion-based. Evaluation of how well material is understood was built into the meetings. • Meetings and TA was followed up by individualized check-ins with all farmers selling commercially, executed and assessed by WF staff.



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Long-Term Outcomes: Continued adoption of food safety practices by Flats Mentor Farmers, and generally broadening Flats Mentor farmers' understanding of the continued importance of food safety for their ethnic specialty crops. Thanks to this MDAR SCBG project World Farmers has been able to start the long process of continued learning leading to a cultural shift for our farmers in regards to promoting and tracking post-harvest food safe handling.

Outcomes Achieved in Quantifiable Terms:

- Over 50 farmers served with information and general training on food safe practices for Specialty Crop sales.
- At least 25 farmers utilized and implemented food safe practices into their individualized harvest and sales practices.
- At least 75 farmers benefitted from our African White Corn research and seed procurement. This number grew immensely by the second year, as seed saving practices were put in place and supported.
- Full understanding of necessary production techniques for Lalu at the farm, and beginning exploration of the market potential.
- 1.5 Acres of Lalu in production during the 2016 growing season.
- Two Communities and three Wholesale Buyers were identified and established in the 2015 and 2016 growing season.
- Flats Mentor Farm Marketing Cooperative sold approximately 220lbs of Lalu to markets in 2015, and approximately 600lbs of Lalu to markets in 2016 to buyers in the Boston Area.
- See additional Quantifiable Achievements under **Beneficiaries** section.

Training and TA Evaluation:

- All trainings and TA was hands-on, visual and/or discussion-based. Evaluation of how well material is understood was built into the meetings.
- Meetings and TA was followed up by individualized check-ins with all farmers selling commercially, executed and assessed by WF staff.

There were 95 farmers at Flats Mentor Farm who produced at least one of the three crops identified in this grant. White African Corn production was the most by far, followed by Lalu production. The least number of farmers cultivated Chinsaga. Of those farmers, 30 - those who sold - adopted post-harvest handling practices presented and taught by World Farmers under this grant.

Key post-harvest handling concerns World Farmers worked with farmers on during this grant covered both food safety and quality control concerns:

- White African Corn: Use food-safe clean bins in the field for harvesting. Harvesting corn is a different process than most other crops where the farmer must harvest into a field bin, clean, and transfer into a post-harvest bin before packing.
- Lalu: Quality control prior to harvesting. Lalu leaves are very tender, and often targeted by many pests throughout the summer. Many of the farmers new to crop sales had to learn the different standards for harvesting for sales, as different standards were



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acceptable for their families and close friends who were the recipients of these crops before formal sales.

- Chinsaga: Maintaining clean field and crops prior to harvesting. Chinsaga will wilt faster if dipped in water post-harvest. The challenge of maintaining a clean field to prevent dirty crops close to harvesting was challenging, particularly for one of the farmers who was close to the road.

Of those who produced these crops not all sold. We measured quality and food safety considerations for each farmer who sold these crops off the farm.

Training and TA Evaluation:

- All trainings and TA was hands-on, visual and/or discussion-based. Evaluation of how well material is understood was built into the meetings.
- Meetings and TA was followed up by individualized check-ins with all farmers selling commercially, executed and assessed by WF staff.

During this grant, there were 35 farmers at Flats Mentor Farm who marketed/sold crops at farmers' markets, CSA, Wholesale, and other market venues during this grant.

World Farmers held our initial/overarching food safety training with 50 farmers at Flats Mentor Farm. Of those farmers: 15 farmers decided not to sell that year; 10 farmers were well-established commercial farmers who utilized the food safety trainings as a refresher; and the remaining 25 were farmers new to selling and/or needed a second year of oversight.

These 25 farmers were provided additional support and training to ensure execution of safe harvest and post-harvest handling measures prior to sales. World Farmers staff offered one on one hands-on assistance and guidance in executing food safe measures at the wash station and in the field. Of the 25 who received additional guidance in the first 3 weeks of sales, 11 small beginning farmers required longer-term support. The biggest issue and reminder given to these farmers was there process of field bins vs. wash bins, stressing that crops cannot cross into the former after they've been washed. By the last month of the summer only 3 farmers needed continued reminders; the remaining 27 were self-sufficient in following all food safety protocols.

World Farmers is proud of this success rate, and the impacts of this grant will last far beyond these farmers as World Farmers continues to successfully implement this hands-on training regimen.

Beneficiaries:

The Organizational Partner and Project Lead was World Farmers, INC., a non-profit based out of Lancaster, MA that advocates for and supports beginning farmers from farm to market. World Farmers' key program is run out of Flats Mentor Farm, a 70 acre parcel of land where over 250 immigrant and refugee farmers work to build independent businesses and farm to feed their families and community. World Farmers supports the farmers at Flats Mentor Farm with access to land and farm infrastructure, and technical assistance on sustainable production and marketing techniques to grow and sell in a new climate and culture.

Flats Mentor Farm has been a place for refugees and immigrants to start farming in this country since 1984. Farmers at Flats Mentor Farm produce nearly 60 acres of ethnic specialty crops, supplying wholesale and retail markets throughout New England, and selling at over 40 farmers'



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markets in Massachusetts. Participating farmers are skilled producers who come from agrarian backgrounds and seek to make a new life for themselves while preserving their cultural identity.

The ethnic demographics at Flats Mentor Farm have always mirrored the political strife in the world, and have always experienced an ebb and flow of participants. In recent years the Farm has welcomed an increase in participants due to the influx of refugees in the region. In 1990 the had 190 Hmong farming families, in 2005 we welcomed our first African farmer from Kenya, in 2010 the number of farmers decreased to 58 – mostly Hmong – farmers, and within the last couple of years the farmer population has expanded rapidly to over 250 farmers, mostly from east and central Africa.

All farmers at Flats Mentor Farm are offered the same opportunities. Each decide to engage in training opportunities, accept technical assistance, and/or develop a business on their own time and agenda.

Beneficiaries in Quantifiable Terms:

- Number of beneficiaries affected by the project's accomplishments: 25 farmers.
- Potential economic impact of food safety trainings: Undetermined. Implementing Commonwealth Quality standards is a process on a communally operated farm like Flats Mentor Farm. Individual farmers uphold all necessary safe handling practices, but until the Farm as a whole officially qualifies for certification produce cannot be marketed as such. Therefore economic impact is still undetermined, but seeing as more markets – both retail and wholesale – are beginning to require food safety certifications it will surely be critical for our farmers continued market success in the future.
- Potential economic impact of production and market research for three specialty crops: Continued. We found great financial potential in both the African White Corn and the Lalu markets. Chinsaga market demand is still under evaluation. Lalu market has grown rapidly as more farmers at the Flats began to grow it. We have also discovered many more of our farmers' cultures cook with Lalu than originally known. Prior to this project farmers were inhibited by lack of access to the seed, and/or they had thought this climate couldn't support Lalu production. By the end of the 2016 season the number of farmers producing Lalu on the Flats had quadrupled, 50% of whom sold wholesale or retail, the rest producing for family consumption. White Corn market potential is harder to determine with limited evaluation capacity. All farmers who grow it sell and distribute on an individual market and sales basis, some of the details and numbers comes out during the winter assessments, but most remains untracked by the farmers themselves.

Lessons Learned

Lessons learned as a result of completing this project focuses on methods and approach when working with immigrant and refugee populations:

- Peer-to-Peer Learning
- Training for Trainers Model
- Multi-media Tools such as video and pictorial guides
- Continued and Repeated Trainings
- Dialogue-based Evaluation



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Organization:

Massachusetts Nursery and Landscape Association, Inc.

Project Title:

Massachusetts environmental horticulture, floriculture and nursery education, certification, marketing and outreach.

Project Summary:

Develop an effective communication solution to increase consumer awareness of the value of working with Massachusetts Certified Horticulturists.

The challenge of maintaining the competitiveness of the horticultural industry (wholesale and retail growing and selling of plants, shrubs and trees) goes far beyond what varieties we plant, how we market and how we price our products compared to other states and/or countries. Industry professionals must constantly expand their industry knowledge and skills to meet the needs of an ever changing business landscape (regulation, zoning and water restrictions).

This project would entail updating the resource guide to include the newest Massachusetts regulations relative to nutrient management, water management and current pest problems. The project would include developing an effective communication solution to increase consumer awareness of the value of working with MCH's. In addition to messaging, current reiteration of the manual this project would include digitizing the 300+ page resource guide into an e-reader format so that future updates are seamless and timely.

This project is absolutely timely and of utmost importance to help the industry to continue to be relevant in this continued economic downturn. To maintain economical viability growers and sellers of specialty crops must be educated and knowledgeable leaders within the green industry.

Since the 1970's the Massachusetts Certified Horticulturist program has been a leader in education and outreach to nursery and greenhouse growers. With increasing consumer awareness of the health, environmental and economic benefits of plants comes the continued challenge of maintaining quality education and information while running a business. The proposed project will expand on the current 200 page manual, by adding timely and current regulatory updates, adding accessibility of the publication in an e-reader and it expands the educational component to include branding and marketing strategies for nursery, floriculture and horticulture businesses.

Background

The challenge of maintaining the competitiveness of the horticultural industry (wholesale and retail growing and selling of plants, shrubs and trees) goes far beyond what varieties we plant, how we market and how we price our products compared to other states and/or countries. Industry professionals must constantly expand their industry knowledge and skills to meet the needs of an ever changing business landscape (regulation, zoning and water restrictions). The Massachusetts Nursery and Landscape Resource Guide is a publication produced by the Massachusetts Nursery and Landscape Association designed as a "must know manual" for industry professionals doing business in Massachusetts. In addition, it serves as the foundation of



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the Massachusetts Certified Horticulturist (MCH) program which enables industry professionals to expand their industry knowledge and skills by completing a written exam (150 multiple choice) and a hands-on plant identification test; completing both sections with a 70 or greater score will award them their certification. In addition, the program requires a yearly recertification component that encourages professionals to be actively involved in cutting edge education, outreach and networking that impact their business and careers in the industry.

This project would entail updating the resource guide to include the newest Massachusetts regulations relative to nutrient management, water management and current pest problems. The project would include developing an effective communication solution to increase consumer awareness of the value of working with MCH's. In addition to messaging, current reiteration of the manual this project would include digitizing the 300+ page resource guide into an e-reader format so that future updates are seamless and timely.

The project had two main objectives:

- Develop an effective communication solution to increase consumer awareness of the value of working with Massachusetts Certified Horticulturists.
- Review, update and digitize the current 300+ page Massachusetts Nursery and Landscape Resource Guide to ensure inclusion of newest pest threats, invasive plant listings, and nutrient management and water regulations.

This project was not been submitted to or funded by another Federal or State grant programs.

Project Approach:

The following is an overview of activities performed by the MNLA task force within the MCH Board.

- development of the Task Force meeting agendas; compilation and distribution of meeting notes; grant management including reporting and data collection;
- program information shared within MNLA & /MCH professional development meetings
- In person and teleconference meetings – to develop timeline and allocation of responsibilities for resource development and implementation
- Revision, update and overview of the MNLA resource guide
- Developed brochure and banner copy for outreach communication
- Design and develop an effective communication solution that included brochure flyer to consumer & professional
- Research pdf to e-reader options & report on comparable options

Lead administration of the project is done by the Executive Director of the Massachusetts Nursery and Landscape Association, Inc., and the Massachusetts Certified Horticulturist board of directors. For this reporting period, the board has conducted numerous face to face meetings, exit polling for exam participants as well as conference calls.

Goals and Outcomes Achieved:

Within this reporting timeframe we have enhanced and added outreach to the published consumer-focused brochure and content for the new Massachusetts and Nursery Landscape Association (MNLA) website (www.mnla.com) to increase consumer awareness of the value of



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working with Massachusetts Certified Horticulturists. In addition, we have developed and printed the consumer flyer and performed outreach at the Boston Flower & Garden show in March 2017 in Boston, MA.

During this phase we redesigned, reformatted, and digitized the MCH manual for sale in electronic format. This electronic format was added to the MNLA shopping cart and we developed outreach tools to bring awareness of the opportunities on social sites and websites. In addition, we have just developed survey questions for exam applicants.

A comprehensive study was conducted to evaluate e reader options; and the services of Sirius Design was secured to apply the e reader options to the current website structure and assist with marketing outreach to the professional and consumer.

Project Activity	Staff	Status
In person and teleconference meetings – to develop timeline and allocation of responsibilities for resource development and implementation	MCH Board Executive Director Researcher/ Consultant/ Marketing	Completed
Resource development and implementation	Manual Consultant	Completed
Develop an effective communication solution to increase consumer and professional awareness & develop baseline surveys	Marketing Consultant	Completed
Redesign and formatting of the current manual which includes preparing for e-reader	Manual Design Consultant	Completed
Copyright, editing, marketing and new for marketing a professional video book trailer that can be incorporated into MNLA's social sites and website	E-Reader Consultant/Contract	Completed
Website development for online sales & marketing – this includes social media outreach	Marketing Consultant & Distribution Consultant	Completed
Implementation Complete – this includes capturing measurable data	Executive Director	Completed

Beneficiaries:

Wholesale and retail nursery, floriculture and horticulture crop producers benefited from the project. There are more than 5,100 horticulture-related businesses within Massachusetts. Wholesale and retail producer members of both organizations exceed 300 businesses. A campaign focused on local resources of plant material and technical experts has the potential to



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positively impact the entire horticultural specialty crop industry. Additionally, all materials and programs created by Plant Something MA are shared with our fellow national Plant Something program participants. As a result, our project will benefit additional nursery, floriculture and horticulture specialty crop producers in ten other states.

In the long run, all specialty crop growers and sellers will benefit from this campaign, even beyond our membership, since it is intended to elevate consumers' awareness about the value of green plants for the air we breathe, the food we eat, the flowers we love. This project enhances and expands on the current Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources programs of "Mass Grown" and "Buy Local" to include the nursery, greenhouse, landscape and floriculture segments of the industry. Increased sales as a result of our promotional efforts will benefit wholesale and retail producers.

Lessons Learned

The Massachusetts Nursery and Landscape Resource Guide (MCH Study manual) is an invaluable publication to the nursery/landscape – horticulture professional. We have found through this grant process that the MCH designation is a highly sought after and honored certification by both the professional and the consumer. The opportunity through the grant to focus more closely on plants and plant identification has opened the door to greater educational opportunities. We were able to model our plant I.D. educational programs after the manual; which has significantly increased engagement and knowledge among professionals. By actively engaging professionals in our cutting edge Plant I.D. education, Hands On Outreach and networking with certified professionals; participants have found that this has had a positive impact on their business and careers within the industry.

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